

INTEGRATING (or NOT)
(Rabbi) (Dr.) Jay Michaelson (Esq.)(Etc.), Kallah 2016

Most of us move in many worlds; we may be mom, lawyer, meditator, wine aficionado, lover – all in the same day. Is it worth trying to integrate these different selves we wear, or just swim in the contradictions? This week, we'll engage in eight distinct modes of conversation – some heart-based, others political; some embodied, others intellectual. Throughout, we will both investigate and maybe experience what stays and what changes as we move between ways of being in the world. Each session will start with a smidge of contemplative practice and with sharing your experiences of (non-)integration.

Also: The numbers below correspond to topics, not to days. We will definitely not get to all of the sources and probably not all of the topics.

1. The Personal Frame: Different Strokes

Questions: How should we live? How should I live?
What does a well-lived life look like for me? Who are my role models?
What are my integration challenges?
What parts of me are most engaged at what times?

Texts: Archilochus, RuPaul, H.L. Mencken, a list and a cartoon
Enneagram Test <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/rheti-sampler/>
Jay Michaelson, *Evolving Dharma*. 160-63

2. The Conceptual Spiritual Frame: One Taste of Nondual Everythingness

Questions: What is liberation? What is enlightenment? *Jewish* enlightenment?
What am I like when I'm "spiritual" versus non-spiritual?
When does it feel bad to get "lost"? When does it feel good?

Texts: Nisargadatta, Oxherding Pictures, Buddhist & Hasidic sayings
Jay Michaelson, *Evolving Dharma*, pp. 86-88
Your voice dialogues experiences

3. Polytheism, Pluralism, and the Repersonalization of God

Questions: What is the relationship between the transcendent and the immanent?
What is "paganism"?

Texts: Jacob Staub, Golden Calf
Exodus 15
Zohar 1:1a
Jill Hammer, "An Altar of Earth: Jews, Goddesses, and the Zohar"

4. The Erotic as Power

Questions: How much ought eros matter in our lives?
What are the connections, of various types, between eros and spirituality?

Texts: Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese"; Lou Reed, "Some Kinda Love"
Conservative Marriage Theorists
Biblical & Talmudic sources on eros on spirituality
Gender roles and Jewish heroes in Genesis and 1 Samuel

Ohad Ezrachi, *Who's Afraid of Lilith?* (excerpt)
Theodore Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoeroticism in Biblical Literature* (excerpt)
Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"
Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai* (excerpts)

5. How to Win Friends and Influence People

Questions: What makes people "successful" in different ways?
How are these different ways rewarded?
What does authenticity feel like?

Texts: Exodus 18
Ellen Fein & Sherrie Schneider, *The Rules*
Dave Kerpen, *The Art of People*, pp. 30-32, 112-13
Introvert/Extrovert cartoon

6. Jewish Antinomianism

Questions: When is it good to reject religion?
When ought religious forms be set aside, in the name of the religious life?

Texts: Jacob Frank, *The Words of the Lord*
Reb Zalman, *Renewal is not Heresy*
Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck"
Rabbi Fred Neulander, Statement to the Jury

7. The Gate of Tears: Embracing Difficult Emotions on the Spiritual Path

Questions: If "happiness" is the goal of spiritual practice, what is it?
How are "spiritual people" supposed to behave?

Texts: Short sources from *The Gate of Tears*
Jay Michaelson, "Don't Listen"

8. Religious Exemptions, Right-Wing Populism, and the Politics of Integration

Questions: What does it feel like to switch modes into political thinking/action?
Can 'awareness' be maintained? What would that look like?
What are the sources of right-wing populism and right-wing religiosity?
Are our ways of life different? How?

Texts: Kim Davis, Statement, September 2015
Dick Cheney, Playboy Interview (excerpt)
Jay Michaelson, *Understanding Religious Exemptions*
Idem, The Religious Right is Right
Idem, Why Most Jewish Environmentalism is Useless
Idem, Is Right-Wing Populism Just Human Nature?

More: www.jaymichaelson.net

1. The Personal Frame: Different Strokes

“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”

- Archilochus

“Diversify and color, or intensify and cover.”

- Stephen Jay Gould

“We are born naked. Everything else is drag.”

- RuPaul

“It’s always the same: Once you are free, you are forced to ask who you are.”

- Jean Baudrillard

“Puritanism: the haunting fear that someone, somewhere is having a good time.”

- H.L. Mencken

“Who installed this software?”

- Me

A List of Desires

Money	Success	Happiness
Love	Family	Power
Fame	Healing, Helping	Sacred/God
Impact (Small/focused; Big/diffuse)	Mystical/Enlightenment	Community Bonds
Pleasure	Adulation	Immortality
Knowledge	Sense of Meaning	Relationships
Creation (art, expression)	Justice	Tribe/Team/Group
Stability, Safety	what else?	

QUEST: Quick Enneagram Sorting Test

GROUP I

Weight:

A. I have tended to be fairly independent and assertive: I've felt that life works best when you meet it head-on. I set my own goals, get involved, and want to make things happen. I don't like sitting around—I want to achieve something big and have an impact. I don't necessarily seek confrontations, but I don't let people push me around, either. Most of the time, I know what I want, and I go for it. I tend to work hard and to play hard.

Weight:

B. I have tended to be quiet and am used to being on my own. I usually don't draw much attention to myself socially, and it's generally unusual for me to assert myself all that forcefully. I don't feel comfortable taking the lead or being as competitive as others. Many would probably say that I'm something of a dreamer—a lot of my excitement goes on in my imagination. I can be quite content without feeling I have to be active all the time.

Weight:

C. I have tended to be extremely responsible and dedicated. I feel terrible if I don't keep my commitments and do what's expected of me. I want people to know that I'm there for them and that I'll do what I believe is best for them. I've often made great personal sacrifices for the sake of others, whether they know it or not. I often don't take adequate care of myself—I do the work that needs to be done and relax (and do what I want) if there's time left.

GROUP II

Weight:

X. I am a person who usually maintains a positive outlook and feels that things will work out for the best. I can usually find something to be enthusiastic about and different ways to occupy myself. I like being around people and helping others be happy—I enjoy sharing my own well-being with them. (I don't always feel great, but I generally try not to show it!) However, keeping a positive frame of mind has sometimes meant that I've put off dealing with my own problems for too long.

Weight:

Y. I am a person who has strong feelings about things—most people can tell when I'm upset about something. I can be guarded with people, but I'm more sensitive than I let on. I want to know where I stand with others and who and what I can count on—it's pretty clear to most people where they stand with me. When I'm upset about something, I want others to respond and to get as worked up as I am. I know the rules, but I don't want people telling me what to do. I want to decide for myself.

Weight:

Z. I am a person who is self-controlled and logical—I don't like revealing my feelings or getting bogged down in them. I am efficient—even perfectionistic—about my work, and prefer working on my own. If there are problems or personal conflicts, I try not to let my feelings influence my actions. Some say I'm too cool and detached, but I don't want my private reactions to distract me from what's really important. I'm glad that I usually don't show my reactions when others “get to me.”

Instructions:

Weight the paragraphs in each Group from 3 to 1, with “3” being *the one that best describes your actual behavior.*

Then match the letters on the table below and add your weights to find what the *three most probable candidates* for your personality type are. For example, one type will be most probable with the highest score of “6” for most agreement in both Groups. Two types will have “5” scores—these are the next most probable candidates for your type. These three scores are the top most probable candidates for your primary personality type.

This test does not indicate your wing or the relative importance of the other types in your personality.

Name _____

2-Digit Code	Add Weights	Type
AX		7
AY		8
AZ		3
BX		9
BY		4
BZ		5
CX		2
CY		6
CZ		1

The Nine Personality Types of the Enneagram

1. The Reformer. *The principled, idealistic type.* Ones are conscientious and ethical, with a strong sense of right and wrong. They are teachers, crusaders, and advocates for change: always striving to improve things, but afraid of making a mistake. Well-organized, orderly, and fastidious, they try to maintain high standards, but can slip into being critical and perfectionistic. They typically have problems with resentment and impatience. *At their Best:* wise, discerning, realistic, and noble. Can be morally heroic.

2. The Helper. *The caring, interpersonal type.* Twos are empathetic, sincere, and warm-hearted. They are friendly, generous, and self-sacrificing, but can also be sentimental, flattering, and people-pleasing. They are well-meaning and driven to be close to others, but can slip into doing things for others in order to be needed. They typically have problems with possessiveness and with acknowledging their own needs. *At their Best:* unselfish and altruistic, they have unconditional love for others.

3. The Achiever. *The adaptable, success-oriented type.* Threes are self-assured, attractive, and charming. Ambitious, competent, and energetic, they can also be status-conscious and highly driven for advancement. They are diplomatic and poised, but can also be overly concerned with their image and what others think of them. They typically have problems with workaholicism and competitiveness. *At their Best:* self-accepting, authentic, everything they seem to be—role models who inspire others.

4. The Individualist. *The introspective, romantic type.* Fours are self-aware, sensitive, and reserved. They are emotionally honest, creative, and personal, but can also be moody and self-conscious. Withholding themselves from others due to feeling vulnerable and defective, they can also feel disdainful and exempt from ordinary ways of living. They typically have problems with melancholy, self-indulgence, and self-pity. *At their Best:* inspired and highly creative, they are able to renew themselves and transform their experiences.

5. The Investigator. *The perceptive, cerebral type.* Fives are alert, insightful, and curious. They are able to concentrate and focus on developing complex ideas and skills. Independent, innovative, and inventive, they can also become preoccupied with their thoughts and imaginary constructs. They become detached, yet high-strung and intense. They typically have problems with

eccentricity, nihilism, and isolation. *At their Best:* visionary pioneers, often ahead of their time, and able to see the world in an entirely new way.

6. The Loyalist. *The committed, security-oriented type.* Sixes are reliable, hard-working, responsible, and trustworthy. Excellent “troubleshooters,” they foresee problems and foster cooperation, but can also become defensive, evasive, and anxious—running on stress while complaining about it. They can be cautious and indecisive, but also reactive, defiant and rebellious. They typically have problems with self-doubt and suspicion. *At their Best:* internally stable and self-reliant, courageously championing themselves and others.

7. The Enthusiast. *The busy, productive type.* Sevens are extroverted, optimistic, versatile, and spontaneous. Playful, high-spirited, and practical, they can also misapply their many talents, becoming over-extended, scattered, and undisciplined. They constantly seek new and exciting experiences, but can become distracted and exhausted by staying on the go. They typically have problems with impatience and impulsiveness. *At their Best:* they focus their talents on worthwhile goals, becoming appreciative, joyous, and satisfied.

8. The Challenger. *The powerful, aggressive type.* Eights are self-confident, strong, and assertive. Protective, resourceful, straight-talking, and decisive, but can also be ego-centric and domineering. Eights feel they must control their environment, especially people, sometimes becoming confrontational and intimidating. Eights typically have problems with their tempers and with allowing themselves to be vulnerable. *At their Best:* self-mastering, they use their strength to improve others' lives, becoming heroic, magnanimous, and inspiring.

9. The Peacemaker. *The easy-going, self-effacing type.* Nines are accepting, trusting, and stable. They are usually creative, optimistic, and supportive, but can also be too willing to go along with others to keep the peace. They want everything to go smoothly and be without conflict, but they can also tend to be complacent, simplifying problems and minimizing anything upsetting. They typically have problems with inertia and stubbornness. *At their Best:* indomitable and all-embracing, they are able to bring people together and heal conflicts.

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the Buddha, dharma, and sangha; why they bow to Buddha statues and chant twice a day. Human beings are embodied and emotional creatures, not merely intellectual ones. We are comforted by ritual, connected by bonds of community and teaching, and we often yearn for “refuge,” for the sense that there are larger forces holding us even when we cannot hold ourselves. Obviously, I appreciate the extrapolation of mindfulness from religion into science, and the secularization of Buddhism in America. But I also appreciate the richness of ritual and myth, and the power of religious community. Certainly, there is little place in my worldview for primitive notions of reward and punishment, outdated myths about cosmology, or religious ethnocentrism. I also do not see either my Jewish or dharma practices as pointing to some fixed “identity.” Yet I think precisely because my dharma practice tends to de-emphasize the devotional and the ritual, there remains a space in my life for religious practice that includes them—not as a matter of fact, but as one of the heart.

This, of course, is but one idiosyncratic way in which these traditions can reinforce one another, among many that have been explored by others. For me, the Buddhist teachings on non-self, emptiness, and dependent origination (all of which I see as pointing to the same non-thing) are among the deepest liberation teachings of the dharma, precisely because they point to what is leftover after the self is taken away. Over the years, whether I capitalize the word “What” or not, that question has remained a koan of infinite depth.

The Selfless Meme

The radical questioning of the self is not confined to various forms of contemplative practice, (i-)spirituality, or mysticism. For the last fifty or so years, postmodern philosophers of mind have critiqued the modern view of the subject, that basically rational, coherent self who, according to about three hundred years of Western philosophy, makes decisions, has various rights, and is the modern citizen of the modern state. This subject, an array of postmodernists have

observed, is a social construction—not necessarily a bad construction, but a construct nonetheless. Human beings are not essentially rational, or essentially selfish, or essentially anything; we all have various attributes, some of which are deemed by some people to be essential. Moreover, these attributes are conditioned by the cultures in which all of us grew up. In some places, dogs are pets; in others, dogs are food. A Canadian who eats dogs might be seen as aberrant, but a Chinese person who eats dogs is perfectly normal. The modern subject, far from being a stable “self” is actually a social construction, an assemblage of memes, narratives, and values entirely made up of historically conditioned factors.⁶ My supposed need for security, home, and hearth is a late-capitalist, bourgeois affectation conditioned by nineteenth- and twentieth-century advertising and cultural production. My tastes, preferences, styles, and self-identifications all are cultural constructions. So, too, every notion that you have, about politics, justice, identity, music, love, whatever, is a meme, constituted outside of “you” and replicated in sophisticated ways. To think that they are “you” is what epistemologist Wilfrid Sellars called “the myth of the given.” It’s what happened when Descartes moved from the arising of thought (*cogito*) to the existence of the full-on modern subject (*sum*). A postmodernist would reply: Yes, the thought arose—but that doesn’t mean there was a “you” thinking it. There was just a set of memes thinking the thought, interpreting it, and constructing a self on the basis of it.

Philosopher Susan Blackmore,⁷ drawing on the now-ubiquitous terminology of Richard Dawkins, calls human minds “meme machines.”⁸ Memes are bits of information that drift about, and replicate themselves with varying degrees of success. Most memes fail: New Coke, Google Wave. But some succeed, and a few succeed astonishingly well: regular Coke, or regular Google, or that old standby that our God is better than your God. (Memes succeed or fail not based on how morally or aesthetically good they are, but on how effectively they replicate. Some can be outright disastrous.⁹) Look at how you’re dressed right now. Chances are, even if you’re

a non-conformist like Susan Blackmore (whose hair is often pink and sometimes purple), your look is entirely a collection of various memes that have drifted through culture and into your brain. Pants and shirts, for a start. Patterns that have come to be associated with this or that social role. Colors—remember that scene in *The Devil Wears Prada*, where a few fashion elites decide on the colors that millions of people eventually wear? Not to mention signifiers that you may have adopted: wedding rings, nose rings, earrings.

In fact, there's nothing in your mind *but* memes. Writes Daniel Dennett, "The human mind is itself an artifact created when memes restructure a human brain in order to make it a better habitat for memes . . . human consciousness is itself a huge complex of memes."¹⁰ We imagine that in our brains is what Dennett calls a "Cartesian theater," where all the various sense data comes together and "we" watch the result.¹¹ But this is just not how the brain works. Actually, the Buddhist notion that when there is a sound, "sound-consciousness" arises is a better representation of what actually takes place; there is no place in the brain where all these sense impressions are assembled. Things happen, and our brains make coherence out of them. There is no homunculus outside the neurobiological system.¹² The "self" is born in the blur.

As we've suggested, this empirically and analytically derived view of the (non-)self is remarkably and usefully similar to the Buddhist experiential one.¹³ This is not a simple comparative game; Stephen Batchelor, whom we encountered earlier, suggests that these parallels are "not purely academic at all. There needs to be an encounter between Buddhism and Western philosophical traditions to get over this kind of Western chauvinism." Like postmodern philosophers from Derrida to Rorty, the Buddha, too, was teaching in a context in which the self (*atman*) was seen as fundamental—even the only true reality. He asked his followers to inquire into where this self actually existed, and when it actually did anything. What he found, and what you can find if you look closely, is that every action you take is caused by various conditions which are not the "self":

your upbringing, your genetic constitution, your gender, your sex, your values (which, of course, you learned from somewhere), your intellectual capacities. Each of these individually may be *yours*, but none of them individually is *you*. “You” are a collection of these qualities, tendencies, views, and opinions. Beautiful, unique, interesting—but not one iota more than all of these non-you aspects bundled together with string.

One of the Buddha’s ways to explain the non-self-ness of objects was to have his monks mentally take apart a chariot and ask where “chariot” comes into being, what “chariot” does as opposed to constituent parts like wheels, carriage, etc. Ultimately, even those parts are reduced to the four elements (in traditional science) or, in our science, to the properties of their molecules, atoms, and subatomic particles. If you don’t have a chariot handy, consider a chair. Is the “chair” holding you up right now? Or is it really the various molecular bonds in the wood, metal, or plastic? Is the “chair” white, or black, or another color, or is it the molecular properties of the pigmentation? And do you perceive the “chair,” or rather, different elements of it, like its size, color, and texture? And so on.

In some forms of meditation practice, it’s possible to observe the process of “selfing” directly. One can note, with a high degree of attention, the arising of all kinds of impulses, ideas, and notions, including notions of the self—and yet none of those actually is “you.” Consciousness arises if the conditions are present; and that’s it.¹⁴ Moreover, just like Susan Blackmore and Meryl Streep told us, each of these comes from somewhere else. In Blackmore’s words, “In a very real sense they are not ‘our’ thoughts at all. They are simply the memes that happen to be successfully exploiting our brain-ware at the moment.”¹⁵ More specifically, in the words of writer Fred Pfeil, “Is it not possible, at least at some moments within one’s meditation practice, to know by taste and sense and feeling, not analytically but experientially, the culturally and historically specific contingency of each and all our senses of things, including and especially of those things we each and all call our separate selves?”¹⁶

It is. If you're in the mood for a simple experiment, raise your right hand right now. Go ahead, just pause for a moment, raise your right hand, and then put it down. Now, whether you did or didn't raise your hand, reflect on what actually happened. Did the thing you call "you" really raise your right hand? In fact, what likely happened were a series of mental processes, all of which were conditioned from outside of "you." Maybe a sense of curiosity, or playfulness, or even obedience, arose, which was probably learned when you were a small child, or which maybe has something to do with your genetic predispositions. Or maybe some feeling of laziness, obstinacy, or contrariness arose—just as much learned from experience, from other people, from a thousand outside sources. Sure, the collection of all of those feelings, plus myriad more, is conventionally referred to as "you." But the collection, as such, never actually does anything—it's a label, nothing more. What actually acts, thinks, feels, dreams are one or more of those pieces, usually in combination, all of which come from outside "you" and none of which is actually "you." They are the conditions that are necessary for the action to take place—not "you." Who moved? The conditions moved.

In fact, all of your hopes, fears, dreams, loves, hates, tastes, predilections; each instance of who you are is wholly caused and constituted by non-you elements. Now, we may get very used to these movements of the mind and come to understand them as ourselves. But while that's a very useful and conventional way of seeing, it is a way of seeing, not a reality. As Joseph Goldstein put it, the self is like the Big Dipper; it's a pattern that emerges when you look from one perspective, but of course, it's not really there.¹⁷ Labels of identity, gender, group belonging—are any of these *you*? Take a look for a few minutes (or hours, or weeks). As a reaction, idea, or emotion arises in the mind, try to notice it (obviously, a concentrated mind makes this easier) and query whether it's "you" or something that is "not-you." What I think you'll find is what Blackmore has said: "We, our precious, mythical 'selves,' are just groups of selfish memes that have come together by and for themselves."¹⁸ Or as David Hume wrote, prefiguring Postmodernity by several hundred years:

2. The Conceptual Spiritual Frame: One Taste of Nondual Everythingness

Let them stay with a guru, watch him, think of him. Soon they will experience a kind of bliss, quite new, never experienced before, except, maybe, in childhood. The experience is so unmistakably new, that it will attract their attention and create interest; once the interest is roused, orderly application will follow.

Experience, however sublime, is not the real thing. By its very nature it comes and goes. Self-realization is not an acquisition. It is more of the nature of understanding. Once arrived at, it cannot be lost. On the other hand, consciousness is changeful, flowing, undergoing transformation from moment to moment. Do not hold on to consciousness and its contents. Consciousness held, ceases. Try to perpetuate a flash of insight, or a burst of happiness is destructive of what it wants to preserve. What comes must go. The permanent is beyond all comings and goings. Go to the root of all experience, to the sense of being. Beyond being and not-being lies the immensity of the real. Try and try again.

- Nisargadatta, *I am That*, p. 323

Far better to simply let the entire game happen on its own, springing up and falling back like waves without changing or manipulating anything, and notice how everything vanishes and reappears, magically, again and again, time without end. Only our searching for happiness prevents us from seeing it... Although peace and happiness do not exist as an actual thing or place, it is always available and accompanies you every instant.

- Lama Gendun Rinpoche

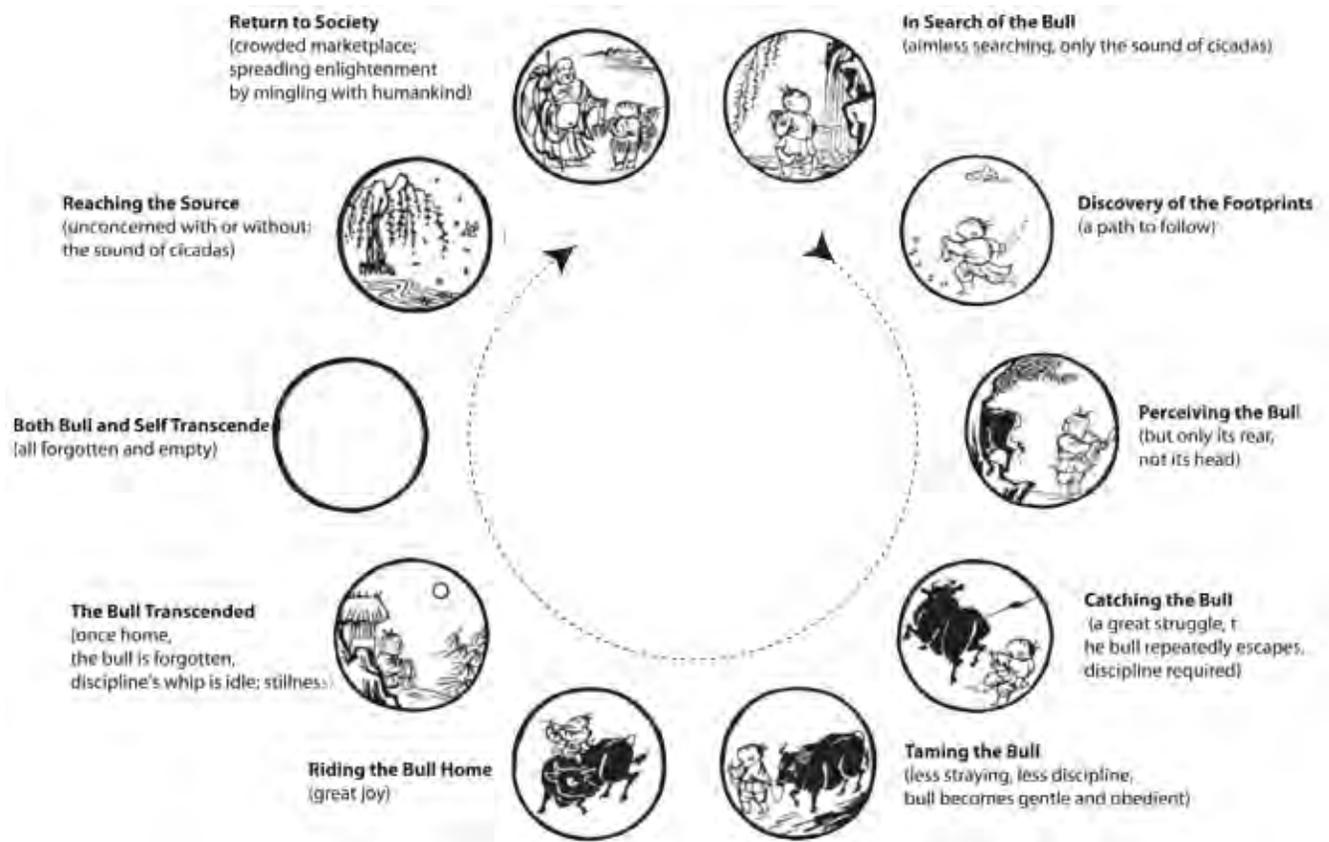
Of course, no experience is any more any experience of nonduality than any other one. Ultimately, all states must be let go, together with all images that would reify the ineffable. This can be a subtle matter. It is one thing to say that God is "just this"—just Being and Nothingness, and nothing more. Yet peak experiences, during which such knowledge seems certain, also tend to occasion phenomena such as love, ecstasy, calm, bliss, and a perception of holiness. Thus many contemplatives suppose that God is in the fire, or the earthquake, or the storm, and mistake the states which occasion holiness for holiness itself. This can lead to all sorts of suffering, because all states pass, as well as to a kind of idolatry and delusion, in which any experience becomes associated with God.

- Me, *Everything is God*, p. 33

"I traveled to the Maggid not to listen to discourses or learn from his wisdom; I came to watch him tie his shoelaces."

- R. Leib ben Sarah (trans. Elie Wiesel)

The Ten Ox-Herding Images (*shiniu*, Chinese, 12th C.)



Barefooted and naked of breast,
 I mingle with the people of the world.
 My clothes are ragged and dust-laden,
 and I am ever blissful.
 I use no magic to extend my life;
 Now, before me, the dead trees
 become alive.

- Kuòān Shīyuǎn

Now, does that mean that these great altered states—including the *jhanas* themselves—are without value? Well, not quite.

Getting Beyond the Good Stuff

Most spirituality is, in large part, a state-change business. Before you pray, do yoga, meditate, et cetera, you're thinking about mortgages and to-do lists, but during your practice, something shifts and you feel opened to something that feels "greater." Afterward, you feel refreshed and reenergized. This is what state-change is: moving your mind from one way of being to another. And spiritual seekers have developed a wonderful array of tools to enable it to happen. These are good things, right? Sure they are.

States are also valuable in that they move you along the path, they give you some rewards along the way, and when they lower the walls of ego, they can open the heart and help people become kinder and wiser. If you've ever felt transformed after an experience of prayer, or yoga, or shamanic work, you know this yourself: the mind has far more capacity than we usually understand, and when its capacities are explored, we grow as human beings. Many people never even get to this stage—and if only they would! So, while I personally am interested in the further stages of the spiritual path, I am politically more interested in the initial stages. I believe that spirituality can bring more and more people over to the good side of the fence—the side with more concern about equality and justice, more respect for the environment, and more pluralism on global and local levels. All that work happens at the basic level of spiritual states: just helping people discover these deep truths for themselves.

But the limitations of spiritual states—and thus the path of concentration itself—are perhaps as important as their strengths. First, states can lead to their own kind of addiction: Wow, that was a great edge realm, now can I have another? How do I get high again? This is a spiritual dead end, a kind of masturbatory spirituality that's not so different from being addicted to drugs. You get high, you get

withdrawal, you get high, you get withdrawal. It's kind of ironic, since, as I just mentioned, one of the many benefits of spiritual highs is that they tend to reduce clinging to getting high. But sometimes it doesn't work that way, and one addiction is simply substituted for another. I've met a lot of "spiritual" people who really are just looking for their next fix, and it's sad. Check out Jack Kornfield's *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry* for more on this phenomenon.

Second, and relatedly, state-withdrawal sucks. Wonderful spiritual experiences can lead to a whole huge pile of suffering when the effects pass, and you're left wondering what the hell went wrong. Believe me, I've spent many months in just that sense of bewilderment. The answer is actually pretty simple: I mistook something conditioned for the unconditioned. You just can't relive those peak experiences after a while. I've tried. I've tried really hard. It just leads to suffering. The only thing you can do, over and over again, is let go. Let go of everything. Every desire, every identification, every place where your ego is hiding out and saying "I'm this." Let go, let go, let go, and keep on falling—because there ain't no place to land. Yet this falling, I am here to tell you, is the same as flight.

Because, third, the states are not the point. As Joseph Goldstein put it, "one week [on retreat] gives the breakthrough to getting a little high and coming to the false conclusion that this is what meditation is all about. But two weeks, we've found, gives enough exposure to enough ups and downs so that you can see the balance between particular states—which is the whole message."⁸ This is also true if the "point" is something more than balance between states but, you know, God, Liberation, the Unconditioned, Emptiness, Nirvana, call it what you will. If that is the point, it doesn't come and go; it is what's always here, totally colorless, totally omnipresent, and in fact, it's the only thing that *doesn't* come and go. There is no state that is it. Not feeling special about this, not feeling relaxed or wise or anything in particular—although sometimes those feelings may arise in the wake of letting go. It just *is*. States thus can be confusing as to the Really Big Stuff.

Finally, mistaking a state for It can have real political consequences. The reason is something I've elsewhere called "fetishizing the trigger." Fetishizing the trigger happens when we find a trigger to amazing mystical states, and then mistake the trigger for the state, the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself. This is the root of fundamentalism: this ritual is holy, that one is not; this religion is right, that one is not; this experience is real, that one is not. States are powerful, and that means they can be dangerous.

Anagarika Ñāniko, whom we met in Chapter Three, told me that today "mostly my practice is very mundane, very ordinary." He says that he used to have "bells and whistles' retreats where there were a lot of those kinds of experiences opening up. That was great, very useful at the time, and went a long way to strengthen faith and to dispel certain doubts. But it also had its negative effects in terms of the corruptions of insight. . . . There are transformative moments on the path, and those moments are significant. But they don't come about through craving or clinging."

This, to me, is wise advice. States are great, but they propel you along the contemplative path—they're not the path itself, whether that "path" is that of a serious meditator on a long silent retreat, or a worldly mindfulness practitioner. The buzz is not the point.

Now, as it happens, I was told on one of my first retreats that concentrated mind-states can become narcotic. But I wanted them anyway—and I don't regret it. Those three years of concentration-idolatry brought on all kinds of insight, compassion, and the other benefits I've just described. They were also freaking amazingly awesome and beautiful. So if you're just starting out: Cultivate states! Just try not to get too attached to them or think they're something they're not. Love, learn, and let go.

The *jhanas* taught me that all I'd ever wanted—experiences of mystical union, bliss, and beyond—weren't enough. Or rather, that they weren't "it." But for those of us who have eaten the apple, tasted the forbidden fruit, and been transformed by it—is there anything beyond? Sure there is.

3. Polytheism, Paganism, and Nonduality

Golden Calf by Jacob J. Staub

From the valley below, the ebullient notes of celebrants,
the beat of tambourines liberated after four hundred years of abuse.

Sing unto the One,
Who smites the tyrant,
Who hears the cries of the oppressed,
Who parts the Sea and plants the seeds for generations yet unborn.

Ana, pool your gold. *Adonai*, give it to God.
Hoshi'a, smelt it down. *Na*, cast the throne.
Ashira, link your arms. *Ladonai*, circle the fire.
Ki, spin into oblivion.
Ga'oh, let go, let go, let go.
Ga'ah, God is One, we are one.
With broken bodies of former slaves, we undulate,
following the Source enthroned into the wilderness of promise.

And up over the ridge, the Levites wait, in formation,
swords on thighs, servants of the Lord, privileged
to follow orders, to do as they are told.
A martial clan descended from the heroes of the Battle of Shechem,
they wear their forebears' medals proudly.
They have been instructed in the proper use of herbs and oils,
in the dire consequences of disobedience, of initiative, of openheartedness.
In formation, they await the signal from Moses, down from the mountain,
to charge, to slay three thousand defenseless, spent from a night of celebration.

Moses claims that You love only him,
that we were spared because he intervened,
that You do not like our offering.
Moses, who has never seen Your face—
not in the silent, steamy eyes of Tzipporah,
from whom he stays cloistered,
not in the bloody foreskins of his sons,
whom he ignores in the name of his holy work.
Moses, who doesn't touch.
Moses, who doesn't dance.
Moses, the bridegroom of blood.

Guide him please, Holy One of Compassion.
We don't need another Pharaoh to lead us into freedom.
Love him doubly, forgive him his wrath.

He was taken as an infant from his mother.
Only You know what befell the lad in the palace,
but below, all we see is his sweltering rage.
Otherwise, as You surely can foresee,
generations will mistake
fervent worship for idolatry.

Exodus 15

1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:
“I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.
2 “The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.
3 The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name.
4 Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has hurled into the sea.
The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea.
5 The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.
6 Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power.
Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy.
7 “In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you.
You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.
8 By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up.
The surging waters stood up like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.
9 The enemy boasted, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself
on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.’
10 But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty
waters.
11 Who among the gods is like you, Lord?
Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?
12 “You stretch out your right hand, and the earth swallows your enemies.
13 In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.
14 The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia.
15 The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,
the people[c] of Canaan will melt away;
16 terror and dread will fall on them. By the power of your arm they will be as still as a stone until
your people pass by, Lord, until the people you bought[d] pass by.
17 You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance—
the place, Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established.
18 “The Lord reigns for ever and ever.”
19 When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen[e] went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters
of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.
20 Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women
followed her, with timbrels and dancing.
21 Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.”

These are little children, youngsters, as is written: *Make two cherubim of gold* (Isaiah 25:18).²⁵

בראשית (Be-reshit), *In the beginning*.

On which site? The site toward which all eyes gaze. Which is that? *Opening of the eyes*.²⁶ There you will discover that the concealed ancient one, susceptible to questioning, *created these*. Who is that? *Who*.²⁷ The one called End of Heaven above,²⁸ whose domain extends over everything. Since it can be questioned, yet remains concealed and unrevealed, it is called *Who*. Beyond, there is no question.²⁹

25. *Make two cherubim*... In BT Sukkot 5b, Rabbi Abbahu interprets the word כְּרֻב (keruv), "cherub," as כְּרִיבָא (ke-ravya), "like a child." The plump childlike angels of Christian art derive either from this tradition or from the Greco-Roman *Erotes*, "loves." Here Rabbi Shim'on relates the golden cherubim to the golden wreaths of the Song of Songs, concluding that both images allude to children.

26. *Opening of the eyes* פתח עינים (Petah Einayim). The phrase originates in Genesis 24:12, where it means "the entrance to Einayim," a village where Tamar seduced her father-in-law, Judah. The midrash on Genesis (*Bereshit Rabbah* 85:7) discovers a deeper meaning: "Rabbi [Yehudah the Prince] said, 'We have searched through the entire Bible and have not found a place called *Petah Einayim*. What is *Petah Einayim*? This indicates that she [Tamar] gazed at the opening toward which all eyes gaze and said, 'May it be the divine will that I not leave this house empty.'" In the *Zohar*, this opening is identified with *Shekhinah*, gateway to the divine. See 3:71b–72a.

27. *Who* מי (Mi). *Binah*, the Divine Mother, is called *Who*. A spiritual seeker may inquire about Her, but such questions do not yield ordinary answers. The identity of the divine is discovered only in a realm beyond words. The mystical name *Who* becomes a focus of meditation, as question

Rabbi El'azar opened, "*Lift your eyes on high and see: Who created these?*" (Isaiah 40:26). *Lift your eyes on high*.

turns into quest. See Shim'on Lavi, *KP*, 1:91a: "Concerning everything that cannot be grasped, its question constitutes its answer."

See *Zohar* 1:29b–30a, 45b, 85b–86a, 237b; 2:126b–127a, 138a, 139b, 226a, 231b.

28. *End of Heaven above* See Deuteronomy 4:32: *For ask now of primal days, which were before you: from the day that God created humankind on earth, and from one end of heaven to the other*. In BT *Hagigah* 11b, this verse is interpreted as imposing a limit on cosmological speculation: "You may inquire concerning *from one end of heaven to the other*, but you may not inquire concerning what is above, what is below, what came before, what will come after." See M *Hagigah* 2:1; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:10.

These restrictions on cosmological speculation recall the Gnostic striving after "the knowledge of who we were, what we have become, where we were, where we have been thrown, where we hasten, from what we are redeemed, what birth is and what rebirth" (Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpts from Theodotus* 78:2). See *Zohar* 1:30a; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 31; idem, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 20, 375; idem, *Sod Eser Sefirot Be-limah*, 371.

29. *Beyond*... The realms beyond *Binah*, namely, *Hokhmah*, *Keter*, and *Ein Sof*, are so unknowable that no question concerning them can even be formulated.

“This end of heaven is called *Who*. There is another below, called *What*.³⁰ What distinguishes the two? The first, concealed one—called *Who*—can be questioned. Once a human being questions and searches,³¹ contemplating and knowing rung after rung to the very last rung—once one reaches there: *What?* What do you know? What have you contemplated? For what have you searched? All is concealed, as before.

“Concerning this mystery it is written: *What can I take as a witness to you? What can I compare to you?* (Lamentations 2:13). When the holy Temple was destroyed, a voice cried out: ‘*What can I take as a witness to you? What can I compare to you?*’ I take *What* as a witness to you. Every single day I have called witnesses against you, since days of old, as is written: *I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day* (Deuteronomy 30:19).³² I compare you to *What*, precisely!³³ I crowned you with holy crowns, gave you dominion over the world, as is written: *Is this the city that was called perfect crown of beauty, joy of all the earth?* (Lamentations 2:15). I called you *Jerusalem built up, a city bound together* (Psalms 122:3). Now, *What can I liken to you, [to console you]?* (Lamentations, *ibid.*, 13).³⁴ Just as you sit desolate, so it is above, as it were. Just as now, the holy people do not enter you in holy array, so I swear to you that I Myself will not enter above until your inhabitants enter you below.³⁵ This is your consolation: I compare this rung to you completely.³⁶ But now that you are here, *your ruin is vast as the ocean* (*ibid.*).³⁷ Yet if you say you cannot endure or be healed, then *Who will heal you* (*ibid.*), really! That concealed, high rung in which all exists will heal you and raise you up.

6

30. *What* מה (*Mah*), a name for *Shekhinah*, last of the ten *sefirot*, daughter of *Binah*. See *Zohar* 2:127a. *Binah* and *Shekhinah* comprise the two ends of heaven, above and below *Tif'eret*, who is called Heaven.

31. and searches ומפּשֵׁשׁ, *Umpashpesh*. Cr reads here: ומתפשט, *u-mitpashshet*, “and expands.” See *Bahir* 134 (194); and Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 39: “Thought expands (מתפשטת, *mitpashshetet*) and ascends to its source. When it reaches there, it is stopped and can ascend no further.”

32. *I call heaven and earth*... Earth symbolizes *Shekhinah*.

33. I compare you to *What*, precisely! Israel resembles *Shekhinah* perfectly.

34. *What can I liken*... Again, Israel and *Shekhinah* (*What*) are compared.

35. I Myself will not enter... The blessed Holy One promises not to enter the heavenly Jerusalem, *Shekhinah*, until the earthly Jerusalem is restored. See *Tanhuma, Pequdei* 1: “There is a Jerusalem above aligned with Jerusalem below. Out of His love for the one below, He fashioned another above... He has sworn that His presence will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until the earthly Jerusalem is rebuilt.”

See Revelation 21:2; *Targum Yonatan*, Psalms 122:3; BT *Ta'anit* 5a; *Zohar* 1:80b (*ST*), 128b, 183b, 231a; 3:15b, 68b, 147b.

36. this rung... *Shekhinah*.

37. But now that you are here, *your ruin is vast*... Now that Israel has fallen to the low state of exile, her *ruin is vast as the ocean*, another name for *Shekhinah*, who shares Israel's exile.

“Who is End of Heaven above; What is End of Heaven below. Jacob inherited this, *running from end to end* (Exodus 26:28),³⁸ from first end, *Who*, to last end, *What*, for he stands in the middle. So, *Who created these*.”

Rabbi Shim'on said, “El'azar, my son, cease your words,³⁹ so that the concealed mystery on high, unknown to any human, may be revealed.”

Rabbi El'azar was silent.

Rabbi Shim'on wept and paused for a moment. Then he said, “El'azar, what is *these*?⁴⁰ If you answer, ‘Stars and constellations,’ they are always visible there⁴¹ and were created by *What*, as is said: *By the word of YHVH the heavens were made* (Psalms 33:6).⁴² As for things concealed, such would not be referred to as *these*, for that word indicates something revealed. This mystery was only revealed one day when I was at the seashore. Elijah⁴³ came and asked me, ‘Rabbi, do you know the meaning of *Who created these*?’ I answered, ‘These are the heavens and their array, the work of the blessed Holy One. Human beings should contemplate them and bless Him, as is written: *When I behold Your heavens, the work of [2a] Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, ...YHVH our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!* (Psalms 8:4, 10).

7

38. *running from end to end* A description of the central wooden beam of the Tabernacle in the desert. The *Zohar* applies this description to *Tif'eret*, the central *sefirah*, symbolized by Jacob, who spans the *sefirot* from *Binah* (*Who*) to *Shekhinah* (*What*). See *Zohar* 1:148b (ST).

39. *cease your words* פסוק מליך, *Pesok millaikh*. The phrase could also be translated: “utter your words.” See BT *Hagigah* 15a-b: פסוק לי פסוקך, *pesok li pesuqekha*, “Recite for me your verse”; cf. *Zohar* 1:238b. “Cease” fits the context of our passage, but the ambiguity may be intentional, in which case a better rendering would be: “Complete your words,” or “Cut your words.”

40. *these* In the verse from Isaiah 40:26: *Lift up your eyes and see: Who created these?* Now that the mystical meaning of *Who* has been established, Rabbi Shim'on explores the meaning of *these*.

41. *they are always visible there* So why would the verse say, *Lift up your eyes and see*, implying that there is something new to see?

42. *By the word of YHVH...* The word of YHVH symbolizes *Shekhinah*, who conveys the divine essence. Thus the heavens were made by Her (also known as *What*), not by *Binah* (*Who*).

See *Zohar* 1:119b; 3:191a, 193b.

43. *Elijah* According to the Bible (2 Kings 11:12), the prophet Elijah did not die a normal death but was carried off to heaven in a chariot of fire. He became associated with the Messianic age (Malachi 3:23–24) and in rabbinic tradition is described as “still existing” (BT *Bava Batra* 121b) and revealing divine secrets to righteous humans (BT *Bava Metsi'a* 59b).

In Kabbalah mystical experiences are known as revelations of Elijah. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 19–21; *Zohar* 1:151a; 3:221a, 231a; *ZH* 59d. In *Zohar* 3:241b Elijah turns to Rabbi Shim'on for instruction! Elsewhere (*ZH* 63d, 70d, 73c [*ShS*]) Elijah encourages him to reveal the secrets and says (62c), “My words will be written by you.”

“Elijah said to me, ‘Rabbi, the word was concealed with the blessed Holy One, and He revealed it in the Academy on High.⁴⁴ Here it is:

‘When Concealed of all Concealed⁴⁵ verged on being revealed, it produced at first a single point,⁴⁶ which ascended to become thought. Within, it drew all drawings, graved all engravings,⁴⁷ carving within the concealed holy lamp⁴⁸ a graving of one hidden design, holy of holies, a deep structure emerging from thought, called מי (*Mi*), *Who*, origin of structure.⁴⁹ Existent and non-existent, deep and hidden, called by no name but *Who*.

‘Seeking to be revealed, to be named, it garbed itself in a splendid, radiant garment and created אלה (*elleh*), *these*.⁵⁰ אלה (*Elleh*) attained the name: these letters joined with those, culminating in the name אלהים (*Elohim*).⁵¹ Until it created אלה (*elleh*), it did not attain the name אלהים (*Elohim*).⁵² Based on this mystery, those who sinned with the Golden Calf said “אלה (*Elleh*), *These, are your gods, O Israel!*” (Exodus 32:8).⁵³ Just as מי (*mi*) is combined with אלה (*elleh*), so the name אלהים (*Elohim*) is constantly polysemous.⁵⁴ Through this mystery, the universe exists.’

“Then Elijah flew off; I did not see him. From him I discovered the word, whose mysterious secret I have demonstrated.”

Rabbi El’azar and all the Companions came and bowed down in front of him. Weeping, they said, “If we have come into the world only to hear this, it is enough.”⁵⁵

44. **Academy on High** The Heavenly Academy, where souls of the righteous study Torah with God.

45. **Concealed of all Concealed** *Ein Sof* or *Keter*, the most hidden recesses of divinity.

46. **single point** The primordial point of *Hokhmah* (“Wisdom”), the first emanation.

47. **it drew all drawings...** The *sefirot* were prefigured within divine thought before they emerged in the process of emanation.

48. **concealed holy lamp** *Hokhmah*.

49. **graving of one hidden design...** *Binah*, the origin of the structure of the seven lower *sefirot*.

50. **created אלה (*elleh*), these** *Binah* emanated the seven lower *sefirot*, which are less hidden than *Binah* and therefore referred to as *these*.

51. **these letters joined...** אלהים (*Elohim*) The letters אלה (*elleh*) (*these*) joined with the letters מי (*mi*) (*who*) to form the divine name אלהים (*Elohim*). See *Zohar* 2:105a.

52. **Until it created...** *Binah* was not called אלהים (*Elohim*) until She emanated the seven lower *sefirot*.

53. “אלה (*Elleh*), *These, are your gods...*” Their sin was that they separated the lower, more concrete *sefirot* (אלה [*elleh*], *these*) from their mysterious source, *Binah* (מי [*Mi*], *Who*), and worshiped *these* alone.

54. **constantly polysemous** The name *Elohim* refers not only to *Binah*, but also to *Gevurah* and *Shekhinah*, as well as to angels and human judges. See Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 42–43.

55. “If we have come...” Similar exclamations appear in rabbinic literature and often in the *Zohar*. See *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 1:3; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 3:11; *Qohelet Rabbah* on 6:2; *Qohelet Zuta* 5:17; BT *Berakhot* 16a, 24b; *Shabbat* 41a; *Zohar* 1:148b, 164b, 240a; 2:99a, 121b, 122a, 193b; 3:26a; KP 1:20d.

An Altar of Earth: Reflections on Jews, Goddesses and the Zohar

Rabbi Jill Hammer, *Zeek* July 2004 (excerpts)

1.

For many years, as I sat in synagogues, someone on the bimah would make an off-handed reference to the evils of idolatry. Many Jews who would never think of condemning the religious practices of Australian aborigines, Peruvian shamans or Buddhist nuns, and who might even enjoy the art in a Catholic church, give sermons about how worshipping images or praying to multiple deities is the root of all evil. Traditional teachers often equate idolatry—that is, worship of multiple gods, worship using images, or worship of components of the natural world—with murder, child sacrifice, and incest. Less traditional ones still condemn idolatry, but identify its evil with the worst kind of misguided materialist beliefs (worshipping one's money, for example). In Torah study sessions, I have seen individuals share their private ideas about God's tangibility or presence in nature, and even point out these ideas when they appear in a Biblical text. But then, someone asks "Isn't that pagan?" as if the conversation is now over. Paganism is bad. Even a hint of paganism is bad. That is the Jewish position.

What is so bad about paganism? For some Jews, it is a matter of ethics. Many have argued that paganism, because of its multiple gods, its focus on nature, and/or its multiple images of God, does not promote ethics or unity among humankind and therefore leads to atrocity. Yet both pagans and "monotheists" (a difficult distinction, as some pagans are monotheists) have massacred innocent people, conquered countries, enslaved the poor and members of other nationalities and races, etc. Some pagan societies are peaceful, and some are violent and warlike; we could say the same for Jewish, Muslim, and Christian societies. I value Jewish theological and ethical traditions, and believe that the Torah comprised a powerful critique of the religions of its time and region. Yet looking at history, it would be hard to make the argument that monotheism promotes universal brotherhood and sisterhood or that it is more ethical by definition than polytheism. Nevertheless, I hear these arguments all the time in shul.

Others say the problem with polytheism and paganism is not ethics but theology. Notably, I have heard this critique leveled many times in (and at) the Jewish feminist community. For the last fifteen years, I have been part of the community of Jewish feminists who are attempting to re-vision God: to re-experience God as not only male, but also female. At this point in time, some Jewish feminists prefer gender-neutral and/or impersonal language for God, but many revel in personal, anthropomorphic God-images that include the pregnant woman, the midwife, the seamstress, the bereaved mother bear, the Lady Wisdom who cries in the streets for people to discover the truth. All of these images have their sources in Jewish tradition, and all come from Jewish texts. Why, then, have they been repressed? God has many attributes, many names. What is the great danger if some of those images are female?

Part of the perceived danger is that using feminine language for God will lead to paganism. And why would that be a problem? Many fears have been expressed: Having both masculine and feminine languages for deity will lead to our creating two gods. Using feminine language will make us think of God as earth-mother; we will think that God forgives all things and our sense of good and evil will disappear (Paula Reimer expressed this in the nineties in an article in Conservative Judaism). We will begin to invoke the fertility goddesses of Canaan, which our ancestors rejected as evil (Cynthia Ozick). We will alienate ourselves from the human-Divine drama of monotheism (Tikvah Frymer-Kensky) or from Jewish communal norms (Judith Plaskow). All of these fears stem from a sense that if we come face to face with a goddess-figure, She will be exactly what the patriarchal, Talmudic critique of Her says She is: an untruth about God.

As a result, many Jewish feminists seem to believe that we should suppress any desire to read stories of goddesses as in any way sacred or connected to the Divine. Yet suppressing a desire never completely works in practice. While some Jewish feminist (and, of course, non-feminist) theologians may be able to legislate against goddess images in their intellectual structures, Jewish mystics and poets, modern and medieval, often perceive the Divine feminine outside the conventions and fears of the Jewish community. They may see the Goddess-and/or God-not only in text but in the trees and the sun and the moon, just as pagans do. They may see her as "dark womb of all," 1 as if She gave birth to the universe (a pagan image Genesis emphatically edited out). Many of us 2 find divinity not only in Jewish texts and prayers about the divine feminine, but in myths of goddesses as well.

I too see God in these ways. I want to be a monotheist, but I also want to recognize the godliness in many images of feminine and masculine divinity, and not only those in Jewish text. I want not to edit my moments of contact with the Divine to get rid of any "pagan" influence. I want not to demonize goddess-imagery while thunder-god imagery rolls through the Hebrew Bible without comment or controversy. In short, I want not to be afraid of goddesses. That's why I love this text in the Zohar.

2.

"It says in Deuteronomy, "You shall not plant for yourselves an asherah or any kind of tree beside the altar of the Lord thy God which (asher) you shall make for yourselves." Are we to suppose that anywhere else it is permitted [to plant an Asherah]? [Of course not!] The truth is that the *heh* [the letter of God's name that represents the feminine Divine] is called Asherah, after the name of its spouse, Asher, and the meaning of the verse is therefore: "You shall not plant another Asherah by the side of the altar which is established upon this [Asherah]." Observe that throughout the Scriptures the worshippers of the sun are called servants of Baal and the worshippers of the moon servants of Asherah; hence the combination "to Baal and Asherah." If this is so (that Asherah is the name of the feminine aspect of God), why is it not used as a sacred name? The reason is that this name brings to mind the words of Leah, "happy am I, for the daughters will call me happy (ishruni)," but this one is not "called happy" by other nations, and another nation is set up in its place. It is written, "all that honored her despise her" (Lam. 1:8). But the real altar is one that is made of earth, as it is written, "An altar of earth you shall make for me." That is why it says in Genesis, "dust from the earth."

Zohar I, 49a

...An asherah, as most scholars agree, based upon excavations as well as other ancient references, is a pillar or tree representing the goddess Asherah. Stone inscriptions show that Israelites may once have worshipped Asherah, a goddess of love and fertility known as "She Who Walks on the Sea," as the female counterpart to the Israelite god we call Adonai. References in Jeremiah 7:18 and 44:17 indicates that Israelite women worshipped the "queen of heaven" by baking cakes-this queen may have been Asherah. In general, the stamping out of Asherah-worship was one of the main concerns of the pure monotheists who established themselves as normative in the days of King Josiah and who are responsible for the composition, according to scholars, of much of the Torah. From those radical monotheists, Judaism evolved. We would expect, then, that all later Jewish references to Asherah would be negative, as indeed most of them are.

Yet the Zohar, steeped in multiple personalized, sexualized, gendered images of the deity, chooses to read this passage in a radically different way. The Zohar writers do not equate Asherah with Lilith or another demonic figure, which would be an easy theological move. Instead, they reread the verse. It is not, they say, that the Torah wants to tell us not to plant an asherah by the altar because it is an idolatrous object. If the Torah had wanted to tell us that, it simply would have said: "Do not plant an asherah anywhere." Rather, the Torah wants to tell us that Asherah is a name for the Shekhinah, the feminine Divine presence, already at the altar. An extra Asherah image would be redundant.

The Zohar proves this assertion by connecting the name Asherah to the word asher. Ordinarily, this word simply means the word "which." However, in Zohar-speak, many common Hebrew prepositions like asher and et are regarded as names for God. In this case, the Zohar reads Asher as a name for masculine divinity. The Zohar redefines the word Asherah as the feminine form of Asher: the Spouse of Asher, the Spouse of God. The verse now means, in the Zohar's reading, that we must not plant an asherah by the altar because Asherah already resides in the altar in the form of the Shekhinah. We do not need a pillar to remind us of Her.

The Zohar does not choose to say that the goddess Asherah is evil or false and that worshipping her is a theological mistake. Rather, it says that the theological mistake would be to assume that Asherah (the tree) is separate from Shekhinah (the altar), when in fact they are one. The Zohar seems to be saying is that the object used to worship (i.e. the altar) God must be single rather than multiple, just as all the faces of the feminine and masculine Divine are ultimately unified.

The Zohar then quotes a passage related to the biblical queen Jezebel's worship of other gods, and informs us that the priests of Baal and Asherah (male and female deities) are worshippers of the sun and moon. The sun and moon, the Zohar goes on, are really Tiferet and Malkhut, the Holy One (male divinity) and the Shekhinah (female divinity). Baal and Asherah worshippers, the very people whom the Torah rejects as the worst of pagans, are actually worshippers of the (legitimate) masculine and feminine Divine. The Zohar appears to be saying that pagans and Jews are worshipping the same aspects of divinity by different names.

The next question, of course, is: If Asherah is simply the Shekhinah by another name, why is it forbidden to worship her? A standard answer one hears is that idolatry is really about separation-idolatrous practices separate the particular manifestations of God (e.g. the

moon/Asherah or the sun/Baal) from the singular godhead, and sees them as different entities. Yet the Zohar does not take this easy approach. Instead, it comes up with a statement even more shocking than the first: The only reason we may not worship the Shekhinah as Asherah is that the name Asherah, as translated by the Zohar, means "happy." (The Zohar proves this by connecting the matriarch Leah, who herself is an image of feminine divinity in the mystical tradition, to the root alef-shin-reish, which translates as "happy" or "fortunate.") The Shekhinah is in exile among the enemies of the Jewish people, and therefore we cannot call Her happy. That-not separation and not idolatry-is the error. The Zohar implies that we abstain from using the name Asherah, not out of theological exactness, but out of courtesy: we abstain in order to empathize with the pain of the Shekhinah.

The unspoken implication of this is that in the world to come, when the Messiah has arrived, we will be able to call the Shekhinah Asherah. It is only in this imperfect world, where the Shekhinah is exiled, that we are banned from doing so. In a completed world, the Zohar implies, Jews would be able to rejoice in the fact that gods and goddesses can be aspects of divinity. Yet because we are exiled, oppressed, divided from others, we can't let ourselves know it.

The Zohar concludes with a brief moment of panentheism. The altar must be made of earth, the Torah says. The Zohar comments: the real altar (that is, the real Shekhinah) is made of earth. Therefore Genesis says: dust from the earth. Humans are made of the dust of the earth that is Shekhinah. Their physical substance as well as their spirit is made of Shekhinah-stuff. That's a mother-earth image if there ever was one.

The Zohar does often get accused of near-paganism. In this passage, more than any other I have seen, I feel the Zohar tips its hand. The Zohar knows that paganism is forbidden. The Zohar also knows, as it reveals in this passage, that its mystical impulse to explore multiple simultaneous God-images, gendered deity, panentheism, and embodied divinity is a pagan impulse-perhaps a holy, ultimately God-centered pagan impulse, but a pagan impulse nevertheless. Yet instead of running away from the mythologized, pagan-like aspects of its vision, the Zohar betrays a discomfort with the complete condemnation of goddess worship. It's the condemnation, not the paganism, that is rejected.

The Zohar believes that oneness underlies all things, even pagan goddesses. Yet the mystic of the time knows the Jews cannot recognize this. So, the Zohar says, in the world to come, we will be allowed to call the Shekhinah by Her name Asherah. Then, She will be one and Her name will be one.

I know the Zohar has terrible things to say about non-Jews, and that one may read this passage as saying that pagans worship aspects of the true God, but do not know that they are doing so. Yet I cannot help but imagine the mystics of medieval Spain holding the secret knowledge that God answers to different names all over the world -- even names that invoke God in nature, even names that call God multiple, even feminine names from ancient Canaan. I imagine them slipping this secret knowledge into the Zohar: the oneness of the Divine is a many-named oneness, a oneness that encompasses the earth.

4. The Erotic as Power

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.
- Mary Oliver, "Wild Geese"

Some kinds of love... the possibilities are endless.
And for me to miss one... would seem to be groundless.
- Lou Reed, "Some Kinda Love"

Conservative Critiques

Carl Schneider, "The Channeling Function in Family Law," 20 Hofstra L. Rev. 495 (1992)
Some of the purposes of marriage:
Regulation of sexual behavior
Reduction of sexual conflict
Limiting man's aggressive instincts
Orderly perpetuation of the species
Building and reinforcement of an economic unit
The regulation of wealth
Development of individual personality
Happiness and future well-being of children
Spare people having to invent the forms of family life de novo, through habitualization
Count on, cope with, and cooperate with other people.
Plan for the future

Steven A. Schwalm, Family Research Council
(<http://www.hatecrime.org/subpages/hatespeech/frc.html>)

Militant homosexuality is fundamentally opposed to religion, family, and anything that presupposes a natural moral order, a transcendent God, or something else higher than ourselves.

Timothy Kandler Beal, Religion and its Monsters 89-90 (2003)

Biblical tradition is fraught with tensions that go to the very core of its conceptions of the world and its ruler God. On the one hand, it is confident in the stable, reasonable order of the cosmos, confident in our ability to articulate that order and confident in God as founder and guarantor of that order; on the other hand, it is haunted by monstrous forms of profound disjunction and disorder, shadowy revelations on the edge between creation and uncreation, cosmos and chaos, and haunted by the lurking anxiety that God, like the world God created, is fraught with the same tensions.

Talmudic and Biblical Sources

BT Kiddushin 81a

Rav and Rav Yehuda were walking on the road. A certain woman was walking ahead of them. Rav said, "Lift your feet before Gehenna." Rav Yehuda said, "But it was Master himself who said of proper men that it is acceptable [for two men to be in the presence of one woman]." Rav replied, "Who said that 'proper men' is ones like me and you?!" [...]
R. Akiva used to scoff at those who committed sin. One day, Satan appeared to him as a woman atop a palm tree. He grasped the palm tree and was climbing, but when he reached the halfway point, Satan released him, saying "If it were not decreed in the heavens 'Beware of R. Akiva and his learning' I would have valued your life at two cents."

רב ורב יהודה הוו קאזלי באורחא הוה קאזלא ההיא אתתא קמייהו א"ל רב לרב יהודה דל כרעך מקמי גיהנם אמר ליה והא מר הוא דאמר בכשרים שפיר דמי א"ל מי יימר דבכשרים כגון אנא ואת אלא כגון מאי כגון רבי חנינא בר פפי וחביריו אמר רב מלקין על ייחוד ואין אוסרין על מצרא שבקיה אמר אי לאו דקא מכרזי ברקיעא הזהרו ברי מאיר ותורתו שויתיה לדמך תרתי מעי ר' עקיבא הוה מתלוץ בעוברי עבירה יומא חד אידמי ליה שטן כאיתתא בריש דיקלא נקטיה לדיקלא וקסליק ואזיל כי מטא לפלגיה דדיקלא שבקיה אמר אי לאו דמכרזי ברקיעא הזהרו ברבי עקיבא ותורתו שויתיה לדמך תרתי מעי פלימו הוה גייל למימר כל יומא גירא בעיניה דשטן יומא חד מעלי יומא דכיפורי הוה אידמי ליה כעניא

Avot de-Rabbi Natan

Scripture says "Keep yourself far from her" (Prov. 5:8). A man is told: "Do not walk down this street or enter this alley, for there is a prostitute here; she is an attractive woman and she seduces all creatures with her beauty." He said, "I am confident that although I walk, I won't look at her and won't desire her beauty." He is told, "Although you are confident, don't go."

BT Kiddushin 40a

רבי חנינא נוח לו לאדם שיעבור עבירה בסתר ואל יחלל שם שמים בפרהסיא שנאמר (יחזקאל כ) ואתם בית ישראל כה אמר ה' איש גילוליו לכו עבדו (ואחר) אם אינכם שומעים אלי ואת שם קדשי לא תחללו אמר רבי אלעאי הזקן אם רואה אדם שיצרו מתגבר עליו ילך למקום שאין מכירין אותו וילבש שחורים ויתכסה שחורים ויעשה כמו שלבו חפץ ואל יחלל שם שמים בפרהסיא איני והתניא כל שלא חס על כבוד קונו ראוי לו שלא

R. Abbahu said on R. Hanina's authority: Better a man secretly transgress than publicly profane God's name... R. Il'ai the Elder said: If a man sees that his desire is conquering him, let him go to a place where he is unknown, don black and cover himself with black, and do as his heart desires, but let him not publicly profane God's name.

Midrash Rabbah Leviticus 23:9

R. 'Azariah et al say: We find that the Holy One, blessed be He, is long-suffering towards every offence except whoredom, and there are numerous texts to bear this out; as it says, And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth ... that the sons of God saw the daughters of men ... and they took them wives ... And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great ... And the Lord said: I will blot out man (Genesis 6:1).

BT Yevamot 63b

בא עד שיכלו כל הנשמות שבגוף שנאמר (ישעיהו נ) כי רוח מלפני יעטוף ונשמות אני עשיתי תניא רבי אליעזר אומר כל מי שאין עוסק בפריה ורביה כאילו שופך דמים שנאמר (בראשית ט) שופך דם האדם באדם דמו ישפך וכתוב בתריה ואתם פרו ורבו רבי יעקב אומר כאילו ממעט הדמות שנאמר (בראשית ט) כי בצלם אלהים עשה את האדם וכתוב בתריה ואתם פרו וגוי' בן עזאי אומר כאילו שופך דמים וממעט הדמות שנאמר ואתם פרו ורבו אמרו לו לכן עזאי יש נאה דורש ונאה מקיים ואין נאה דורש ואתה נאה דורש ואין נאה מקיים אמר להן בן עזאי ומה אעשה שנפשי חשקה בתורה אפשר לעולם שיתקיים על ידי אחרים תניא אידך רבי אליעזר אומר כל מי שאין עוסק בפריה ורביה כאילו שופך דמים

It was taught: R. Eliezer stated, He who does not engage in procreation is as though he sheds blood... R. Jacob said: As though he has diminished the Divine Image... Ben 'Azzai said: As though he sheds blood and diminishes the Divine Image... They said to Ben 'Azzai: Some preach well and act well, others act well but do not preach well; you, however, preach well but do not act well. Ben 'Azzai replied: But what shall I do, seeing that my soul is in love with the Torah; the world can be carried on by others.

BT Ketubot 63a

לבן עזאי הכי והיינו דאמרי אינשי רחילא בתר רחילא אזלא כעובדי אמה כך עובדי ברתא רב יוסף בריה דרבא שדריה אבוהי לבי רב לקמיה דרב יוסף פסקו ליה שית שני כי הוה תלת שני מטא מעלי יומא דכפורי אמר איזיל ואיחזינהו לאינשי ביתי שמע אבוהי שקל מנא ונפק לאפיה אמר ליה זונתך נזכרת איכא דאמרי אמר ליה יונתך נזכרת איטרוד לא מר איפסיק ולא מר איפסיק:

R. Yosef the son of Rava was sent by his father to the Beit Midrash... for six years. After three years, on Erev Yom Kippur, he said "I will go visit my family." His father heard of this and went out to him with a weapon, saying "You remembered your whore?" ... They fought and neither of them stopped.

BT Yoma 54a

כיצד דוחקין ובולטין ויוצאין בפרוכת ונראין כשני דדי אשה שנא' (שיר השירים א) צרור המור דודי לי בין שדי ילין אמר רב קטינא בשעה שהיו ישראל עולין לרגל מגלליו להם את הפרוכת ומראין להם את הכרובים שהיו מעורים זה בזה ואומרים להן ראו חבתכם לפני המקום כחבת זכר ונקבה מתיב רב חסדא (במדבר ד) ולא יבואו לראות כבלע את הקדש ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב בשעת הכנסת כלים לנרתק שלהם אמר רב נחמן

Rav Qetina said: When Israel used to make the festival pilgrimage, [the priests] would roll up for them the parokhet, and show them the cherubim which were intertwined with one another, and say to them: 'Behold! Your love before God is like the love of male and female.'

2 Kings 23:6-7

ו וַיֵּצֵא אֶת-הָאֲשֵׁרָה מִבֵּית יְהוָה מִחוּץ לִירוּשָׁלַם, אֶל-נַחַל קִדְרוֹן, וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֹתָהּ בְּנַחַל קִדְרוֹן, וַיִּדְקֵק לְעֶפֶר; וַיִּשְׂלֹךְ, אֶת-עֶפְרָה, עַל-קִבְרֵי בְנֵי הָעָם.

6 And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the common people.

ז וַיִּתֵּץ אֶת-בְּתֵי הַקְּדֹשִׁים, אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית יְהוָה: אֲשֶׁר הֵנְשִׁים, אֲרָגוֹת שָׁם בְּתֵים--לְאֲשֵׁרָה.

7 And he broke down the houses of the *kedeshim*, that were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove coverings for the Asherah

Gender Roles of Male Biblical Heroes

a. Abraham: *Akedah* and Submission

1. The text: Genesis 22:1-14

א וַיְהִי, אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, וַהֲאֱלֹהִים, נִסָּה אֶת-אַבְרָהָם; וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו, אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲגַנִּי.

1 And it came to pass after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him: 'Abraham'; and he said: 'Here am I.'

ב וַיֹּאמֶר קח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךְךָ אֶת-יִחִידְךָ אִשְׁר־אַהֲבָתְךָ, אֶת-יִצְחָק, וְלֶךְ-לְךָ, אֶל-אֶרֶץ מֹרְיָה; וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם, לְעֹלָה, עַל-אַחַד הַהָרִים, אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ.

2 And God said: 'Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of.'...

ג וַיָּבֹאוּ, אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר-לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים, וַיִּבֶן שָׁם אַבְרָהָם אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, וַיַּעֲרֹךְ אֶת-הָעֵצִים; וַיַּעֲקֹד, אֶת-יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ, וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתוֹ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, מִמַּעַל לְעֻצִּים.

9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

ד וַיִּשְׁלַח אַבְרָהָם אֶת-יָדוֹ, וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הַמַּאֲכָלֶת, לְשַׁחֵט, אֶת-בְּנוֹ.

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

ה וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מֵלֶאדָּה יְהוָה, מִן-הַשָּׁמַיִם, וַיֹּאמֶר, אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם; וַיֹּאמֶר הֲגַנִּי.

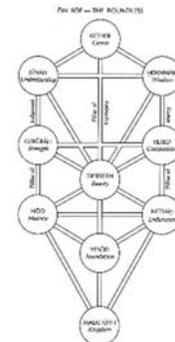
11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said: 'Abraham, Abraham.' And he said: 'Here am I.'

ו וַיֹּאמֶר, אֶל-תְּשַׁלַּח יָדְךָ אֶל-הַבְּעֵר, וְאֶל-תַּעַשׂ לוֹ, מְאוּמָה: כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי, כִּי-יְרֵא אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה, וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת-בְּנֶךְךָ אֶת-יִחִידְךָ, מִמִּנִּי.

12 And he said: 'Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that you are a God-fearing man, and have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.'

2. Gender Lens #1: Kabbalah

In the symbolism of the *sefirot*, Abraham and Isaac are embodiments of *hesed* and *gevurah* respectively. *Hesed* is gendered masculine, associated with acting, giving, spreading out, expanding. *Gevurah* is gendered feminine (which is surprising!), associated with receiving, yielding, containing, and restricting.



3. Gender Lens #2: BDSM



In BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism) sexuality, the **top** is the giving partner in sexual play (such as flogging, binding, and being master) and the **bottom** is receiving. The **dom** is the dominant partner, the **sub** is the submissive one, and a **switch** changes roles. One may also “top from the bottom” – i.e. the bottom is the dom.

Questions:

What does Abraham have to learn in the Akedah?

How does he learn it?

Is Abraham/*hesed* the top or the bottom?

Is Isaac/*gevurah* the top of the bottom?

b. Jacob and his man

Same questions as before, but now about Jacob and the Man he wrestles with. What did Jacob need to learn during his rite of passage, and how did he learn it? How are the two related?

(Illustration: Jacob Epstein, *Jacob & the Angel*)



1. Biblical Sources

Genesis 25: 24-28 (Jacob's birth)

- | | |
|---|---|
| כד וַיִּמְלֵאוּ יָמֶיהָ לֵלְדֹת; וְהִנֵּה תוֹמֵם, בְּבֶטְנָהּ. | 24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. |
| כה וַיֵּצֵא הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוּנִי, כֻּלּוֹ כְּאַדְרָת שֵׁשׁ; וַיִּקְרָאוּ שְׁמוֹ, עֵשָׂו. | 25 And the first came forth ruddy, all over like a hairy mantle; and they called his name Esau. |
| כו וְאַחֲרָי-כֵן יָצָא אָחִיו, וְיָדוֹ אֲחִזָּת בְּעֵקֶב עֵשָׂו, וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ, יַעֲקֹב; וַיִּצְחַק בֶּן-שָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה, בְּלִדְתָם אֹתָם. | 26 And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob. And Isaac was threescore years old when she bore them. |
| כז וַיִּגְדְּלוּ, הַנְּעָרִים, וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צֵיד, אִישׁ שָׂדֶה; וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם, יֹשֵׁב אֹהֲלִים. | 27 And the boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a [simple?] man, dwelling in tents. |
| כח וַיֵּאָהֵב יַצְחָק אֶת-עֵשָׂו, כִּי-צֵיד בְּפִי; וְרִבְקָה, אֲהָבַת אֶת-יַעֲקֹב. | 28 Now Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; and Rebekah loved Jacob. |

Genesis 27:11-17 (Preparing to deceive Isaac)

- | | |
|---|--|
| יא וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב, אֶל-רִבְקָה אִמּוֹ: הֵן עֵשָׂו אָחִי אִישׁ שֹׁעַר, וְאֲנֹכִי אִישׁ חֶלֶק. | 11 And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother: 'Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. |
|---|--|

יב אולי ימשני אבי, והייתי בעיניו כמתעטע; והבאתי עלי קללה, ולא ברכה.
12 Maybe my father will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a mocker; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.'

יג ותאמר לו אמו, עלי קללתך בני; אך שמע בקלי, ולך קח-לי.
13 And his mother said unto him: 'Upon me be thy curse, my son; only hearken to my voice, and go fetch me them.'

Genesis 32:25-33 (Wrestling with the Man)

כה וינותר יעקב, לבדו; ויאבק איש עמו, עד עלות השחר.
25 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

כו וירא, כי לא יכל לו, ויגע, בכף-ירכו; ותקע כף-יָרְךָ יעקב, בהאבקו עמו.
26 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained, as he wrestled with him.

כז ויאמר שלחני, כי עלה השחר; ויאמר לא אשלחה, כי אם-ברכתני.
27 And he said: 'Let me go, for the day breaks.' And he said: 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.'

כח ויאמר אליו, מה-שְׁמֶךָ; ויאמר, יעקב.
28 And he said unto him: 'What is thy name?' And he said: 'Jacob.'

כט ויאמר, לא יעקב יאמר עוד שְׁמֶךָ-- כי, אם-יִשְׂרָאֵל: כי-שָׁרִית עם-אלהים ועם-אֲנָשִׁים, ותוּכַל.
29 And he said: 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for thou hast striven with God and with men, and hast prevailed.'

ל וישאל יעקב, ויאמר הגידה-נָא שְׁמֶךָ, ויאמר, לְמָה זֶה תִּשְׁאֵל לְשִׁמִּי; ויברך אותו, שָׁם.
30 And Jacob asked him, and said: 'Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.' And he said: 'Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?' And he blessed him there.

לא ויקרא יעקב שם המקום, פְּנִיאֵל: כי-רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פְּנִים-אֶל-פְּנִים, ותִּנְצַל נַפְשִׁי.
31 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: 'for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.'

לב ויזרח-לו השמש, כאשר עבר את-פְּנִיאֵל; והוא צלע, על-יָרְכוּ.
32 And the sun rose upon him as he passed over Peniel, and he limped upon his thigh.

לג על-כן לא-יאכלו בני-יִשְׂרָאֵל את-גִּיד הַנֶּשֶׂה, אֲשֶׁר על-כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ, עד, הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: כי נָגע בְּכַף-יָרְךָ יעקב, בְּגִיד הַנֶּשֶׂה.
33 Therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew of the thigh-vein which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, even in the sinew of the thigh-vein.

Question: As before, if you had to guess, who are the “tops” and the “bottoms” in this list? Any “switches”? Any transformations or revelations?

Jacob Esau Rachel Leah The Man/God

Zohar 170b:

And why is it called "gid hanasheh" - the thigh muscle? Because it is the muscle which causes a man to forget (nashe) the service of his master, and is the seat of the evil inclination. When (the man/angel) wrestled with Jacob, he could find no place where he could prevail over Jacob, since all of Jacob's limbs helped him, and they were all strong, and none of them were weak. What did he do? He touched the hollow of his thigh, the muscle there - he touched his sex, the seat of his evil inclination, from where the evil inclination comes to people.

From Theodore Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*:

"On the human, it [the sciatic nerve] runs the length of the back of the upper leg after descending from under the buttocks.... "A particularly violent grip at the base of the buttocks could strain or damage this nerve... The same would be true of a violent sexual assault."

Zohar 1:154a:

"And God saw that Leah was despised" (Gen 29:31) Why was she despised? ... The beauty of Jacob was like the beauty of Adam'. Just as Adam had two wives, the first and second Eve, so Jacob had Leah and Rachel. The first Eve (Lilith) was the shell (*klipah*) that covered the Leah of holiness. And because Jacob thought that she was similar to the first Eve, he did not want to marry her. This is therefore the secret of 'that Leah was despised'. He thought that (Leah) should be given to Esau, just like the first Eve, Lilith the wicked, was the bride of Samael, the ministering angel of Esau.

A bit of explanation from Ohad Ezrachi, *Who's Afraid of Lilith?*, chapter 5:

From the moment of his birth, Jacob has difficulty accepting himself. He is born holding onto his brother's heel - attempting to build his own identity by latching onto the strong figure of his older brother. He can only accept the divine blessing by becoming someone else, as if only his older brother could be worthy of such a blessing. This is why he tries, at every opportunity, to become part of his brother's story and to usurp his place by becoming what he is not: Esau.... As the Zohar suggests, "Jacob did not want to attach himself to anything incomprehensible to him." He prefers those things and people that fit his cultured life as one "who stays in camp" (Gen. 26: 27). Thus, he is attracted to Rachel - precisely because she did not challenge him in any way. Leah, on the other hand, radiates passion...

Now [after the wrestling match] Jacob is no longer the patriarch who will love Rachel and hate Leah. By admitting his Jacob-ness, Jacob is also recognizing his own femininity, which, conversely, also allows his masculinity. We recall that Jacob was described initially in the terms of a feminine, cultured man of "the camp," but he did not accept this side of himself and wanted to be like his brother Esau, the man of the field. This is why he tries to steal Esau's identity. By accepting his female side, Jacob can now understand Leah-Lilith - the wild woman.... When Jacob becomes Israel, he no longer needs to sustain a demonic image of Leah-Lilith. She, in fact, becomes his true beloved, replacing Rachel.

c. David Learns to Carry Armor

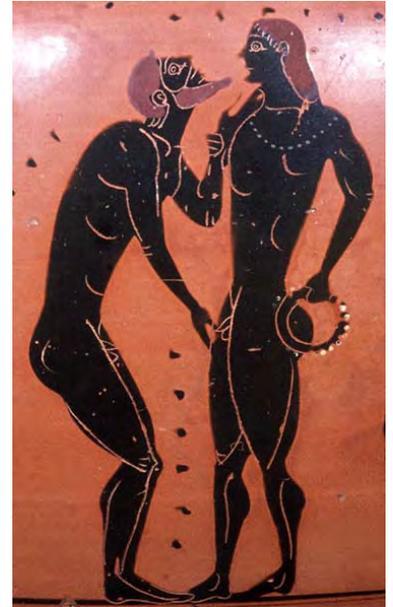
Question: What does David learn in his relationships with Saul and Jonathan and how did he learn it?

1. More terminology:

ἐραστής (Erastes): The older (usually aged 25-35), dominant, insertive, "active" partner in a classical Greek pederastic relationship.

ἐρόμενος (Eromenos): The younger (usually aged 15-17), submissive, receptive, "passive" partner

Image: Athenian amphora, 5th century BCE (See Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*)



2. The Sources

1 Samuel 18:1-4 (Jonathan falls in love with David)

א וַיְהִי, כְּכַלְתּוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֶל-שָׂאוּל, וַנִּפְּשׂ יְהוֹנָתָן, נִקְשְׁרָה בְּנֶפֶשׁ דָּוִד; וַיֵּאָהֱבוּ (וַיִּצְאָהֱבֵהוּ) יְהוֹנָתָן, כְּנֶפְשׁוֹ.

1 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

ב וַיִּקְחֵהוּ שָׂאוּל, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא; וְלֹא נָתַנוּ, לְשׁוּב בַּיִת אָבִיו.

2 And Saul took him [David] that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

ג וַיַּכְרֵת יְהוֹנָתָן וְדָוִד, בְּרִית, בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתוֹ, כְּנֶפְשׁוֹ.

3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

ד וַיִּתְּפֹשֶׁט יְהוֹנָתָן, אֶת-הַמַּעֲעִיל אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו, וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ, לְדָוִד; וּמַדְיֹו, וְעַד-סַרְבּוֹ וְעַד-קִשְׁתּוֹ וְעַד-חַגְרֹו.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

1 Samuel 20:30-33 (Saul castigates Jonathan)

ל וַיִּסַּר-אֶף שָׂאוּל, בִּיהוֹנָתָן, וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ, בְּוַעֲבֹת הַמְּרִדוֹת: הַלּוֹא יָדַעְתִּי, כִּי-בָחַר אֶתְּךָ לְבֵן-יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְבִשְׁתְּךָ, וּלְבִשְׁתְּ עַרְוַת אִמֶּךָ.

30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him: 'Thou son of perverse rebellion, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own shame, and unto the shame of thy mother's nakedness?

- לא** כי כל-הימים, אֲשֶׁר בֶּן-יִשִׁי חַי עַל-הָאָדָמָה, לֹא תִכּוֹן, אַתָּה וּמַלְכוּתְךָ; וְעַתָּה, שְׁלַח וְקַח אֹתוֹ אֵלַי--כִּי בֶן-מָוֶת, הוּא. {ס}
- לב** וַיַּעַן, יְהוֹנָתָן, אֶת-שָׁאוּל, אָבִיו; וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לָמָּה יוּמָת, מִה עָשָׂה.
- לג** וַיִּטֵּל שָׁאוּל אֶת-הַחֲנִית עָלָיו, לְהַפְתּוֹ; וַיָּדַע, יְהוֹנָתָן, כִּי-כָלָה הָיָא מַעַם אָבִיו, לְהַמִּית אֶת-דָּוִד. {ס}
- 31** For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. So, therefore now send for and fetch him unto me, for he deserves to die.'
- 32** And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him: 'Why should he be put to death? what has he done?'
- 33** And Saul cast his spear at him to smite him; whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to put David to death.

1 Samuel 20: 41-42 (David and Jonathan part)

- מא** הַנָּעַר, בָּא, וַדּוּד קָם מֵאֲצֶל הַגִּבַּב, וַיִּפֹּל לְאַפָּיו אַרְצָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים; וַיִּשְׁקוּ אִישׁ אֶת-רֵעֵהוּ, וַיִּבְכּוּ אִישׁ אֶת-רֵעֵהוּ, עַד-דָּוִד, הַגִּדִיל.
- מב** וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן לְדָוִד, לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם: אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ שְׁנֵינוּ אֲנַחְנוּ, בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה לֵאמֹר, יְהוָה יִהְיֶה בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וּבֵין יִרְעֵי וּבֵין יִרְעֵיךָ, עַד-עוֹלָם. {פ}
- 41** And as soon as [Jonathan's] lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the South, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times; and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.
- 42** And Jonathan said to David: 'Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying: The LORD shall be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed, forever.'

2 Samuel 1:25-27 (David's eulogy for Saul and Jonathan)

- כה** אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים, בְּתוֹךְ הַמִּלְחָמָה--יְהוֹנָתָן, עַל-בְּמוֹתָיִךְ חָלָל.
- כו** צָר-לִי עָלֶיךָ, אַחִי יְהוֹנָתָן--נֶעְמַת לִי, מְאֹד; נִפְלְאָתָה אַהֲבָתְךָ לִי, מֵאַהֲבַת נָשִׁים.
- כז** אֵיךְ נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים, וַיֵּאבְדוּ כָלֵי מִלְחָמָה.
- 25** How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan upon thy high places is slain!
- 26** I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; wonderful was thy love to me, passing the love of women.
- 27** How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

I Samuel 14:6-7

- ו** וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן אֶל-הַנָּעַר נָשָׂא כְלָיו, לָכֵה וְנִעְבְּרָה אֶל-מִצֵּב הָעֵרְלִים הָאֵלֶּה--אִוְלַי יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה, לָנוּ: כִּי אִין לִיהֵנָּה מַעְצוֹר, לְהוֹשִׁיעַ בָּרַב אוֹ בְּמִעוֹט.
- ז** וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ נָשָׂא כְלָיו, עָשֵׂה כָל-אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבְבְּךָ; נֹטֵה לֵךְ, הִנְנִי עִמָּךְ כָּל-בְּבָרָךְ.
- 6** And Jonathan said to the young man that bore his armor: 'Come and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us; for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.'
- 7** And his armor-bearer said unto him: 'Do all that is in thy heart; turn thee, behold I am with thee according to thy heart.'

I Samuel 31:4-5

ד ויאמר שאול לנשא כליו שלף סרבו ודקרני בה, פן-יבואו הערלים האלה ודקרני והתעללו-בי, ולא אבה נשא כליו, כי ירא מאד; ויקח שאול את-החרב, ויפל עליה.

4 Then said Saul to his armor-bearer: 'Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and make a mock of me.' But his armour-bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took his sword, and fell upon it.

ה וירא נשא-כליו, כי מת שאול; ויפל גם-הוא על-חרבו, וימת עמו.

5 And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell upon his sword, and died with him.

II Samuel 5:19

יט וישאל דוד ביהוה, לאמר, האעלה אל-פלשתים, התתנם בנדי; ויאמר יהוה אל-דוד עלה, כי-נתן אתן את-הפלשתים בנך.

19 And David inquired of the LORD, saying: 'Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?' And the LORD said unto David: 'Go up; for I will certainly deliver the Philistines into thy hand.'

Some famous erastes / eromenos couples:

Alexander the Great / Hephaestion

Achilles / Patroclus

Saul / David

Jonathan / David

YHVH / Saul

YHVH / David

Gilgamesh / Enkidu

Zeus / Ganymede (sort of)

Socrates / Alcibiades

Harmodius / Aristogeiton

Batman / Robin, Harry / Ron, Frodo / Sam



Theodore Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*, pp. 74-75; 260:

One of the most remarkable features of the narrative we have been reading concerning David and his lovers is the way in which David's relation with human males is woven into and affects the depiction of David's homoerotic relationship with YHVH... This apprenticeship in love prepares David for what will come.... Not only is homoeroticism a training ground for relationship to the divine (or at least to this particular divinity), but the resultant homoerotic relation to the divine also transforms the divine partner in the relationship in crucially important ways.

Jay Michaelson, "Bottoming for God," *Lilith* 2010:

The Jewish hero has to "bottom" for God to "top" for Israel. A "total top" cannot be God's servant... It is David's destiny to be God's *eromenos* even as he is Israel's *erastes*, and he must train for both roles.... As king of Israel, David must play such a dual role in order to at once rule (Israel) and be ruled (by God). And in order to do that, he must learn how to "carry the armor" of another man.

Audre Lorde, *The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (1978)

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives.

We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society. On the one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence.

It is a short step from there to the false belief that only by the suppression of the erotic within our lives and consciousness can women be truly strong. But that strength is illusory, for it is fashioned within the context of male models of power.

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters.

But the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough.

The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, and plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.

The erotic is a measure between our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. ...

This internal requirement toward excellence which we learn from the erotic must not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from ourselves nor from others. Such a demand incapacitates everyone in the process. For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness. ...

The very word erotic comes from the Greek word eros, the personification of love in all its aspects - born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives. ...

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy, in the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, harkening to its deepest rhythms so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, or examining an idea.

That self-connection shared is a measure of the joy which I know myself to be capable of feeling, a reminder of my capacity for feeling. And that deep and irreplaceable knowledge of my capacity for joy comes to demand from all of my life that it be lived within the knowledge that such satisfaction is possible, and does not have to be called marriage, nor god, nor an afterlife.

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe.

During World War II, we bought sealed plastic packets of white, uncolored margarine, with a tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched like a topaz just inside the clear skin of the bag. We would leave the margarine out for a while to soften, and then we would pinch the little pellet to break it inside the bag, releasing the rich yellowness into the soft pale mass of margarine. Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it.

I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience.

We have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings. But, once recognized, those which do not enhance our future lose their power and can be altered. The

fear of our deepest cravings keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our own oppression as women.

When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directives only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual's. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering, and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like the only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.

In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial....

When we look away from the importance of the erotic in the development and sustenance of our power, or when we look away from ourselves as we satisfy our erotic needs in concert with others, we use each other as objects of satisfaction rather than share our joy in the satisfying, rather than make connection with our similarities and our differences. To refuse to be able that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd.

The erotic cannot be felt secondhand. As a Black lesbian feminist, I have a particular feeling, knowledge, and understanding for those sisters with whom I have danced hard, played, or even fought. This deep participation has often been the forerunner for joint concerted actions not possible before.

But this erotic charge is not easily shared by women who continue to operate under an exclusively European-American male tradition. I know it was not available to me when I was trying to adapt my consciousness to this mode of living and sensation.

Only now, I find more and more women-identified women brave enough to risk sharing the erotic's electrical charge without having to look away, and without distorting the enormously powerful and creative nature of that exchange. Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.

For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.

Toward a New Theology of Sexuality

Judith Plaskow

Jewish attitudes toward sexuality are complex and often confusing and conflicting. Both historical changes and developments and contradictions within particular historical movements and periods yield an array of views on sexuality from the freest to the most inhibited.¹

THREE PATRIARCHAL ATTITUDES*

From a feminist standpoint, there are three aspects of Jewish attitudes toward sexuality particularly in need of exploration and change: the centrality of an "energy/control" paradigm of sexuality; the assumption that all sexuality is the same, namely marital and exclusively heterosexual; and the special place of women in the economy of sexual control. While each of these topics might be the subject of a separate article, I will consider them only briefly as background for setting out an alternative feminist perspective on sexuality.

The Centrality of Control

An emphasis on control is central to Jewish understandings of sexuality. From the viewpoint of the tradition's "energy/control" model, sexuality is an independent and sometimes alien energy that must be held in check through personal discipline and religious constraints.² While the sexual impulse is given by God and thus is a normal and healthy part of human life, sanctified within its proper framework, sexuality also requires careful, sometimes rigorous control in order that it not violate

* Heads added.

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the boundaries assigned it. Conflicts between affirming sexuality and enforcing restraint emerge in the tradition in a number of forms, in part through the very naming of the sexual impulse. The rabbis called this impulse the *yetzer-hara*, the evil impulse, and yet at the same time acknowledged its necessity to the creation and sustenance of the world. "Were it not for the evil impulse," said Rabbi Nahman b. Samuel, "man would not build a house, or take a wife, or beget a child, or engage in business."³

Sexuality as Marital

Assuming that sexuality must be controlled, the tradition understands heterosexual marriage as the proper framework for taming and enjoying the sexual impulse. Even within marriage, sex is forbidden during menstruation and for seven days thereafter. Outside the boundaries of marriage lies a whole realm of licentiousness and transgression that must be carefully guarded against with well-defined restraints. Legal prohibitions, moral standards, and social expectations all serve to delineate certain periods within a marriage as the sole realm of the sexually permitted. So pervasive is the assumption that sex is properly marital and heterosexual that homosexuality gets short shrift, even by way of interdiction. Male homosexuality is a major offense (*to'evah*, an abomination), but it is assumed by the rabbis to be so rare in Israel that there is little need for safeguards against it.

The Special Place of Women

While moral norms concerning sexuality generally apply both to men and women, women play a special role in the Jewish understanding of sexuality. They are the ubiquitous temptations, the sources and symbols of illicit desire, the ones whose sexuality threatens even their husbands/possessors with the possibility of illegal action. To speak of control is necessarily to speak of women — of the need to cover them, avoid them, and contain them in proper (patriarchal) families where their threat is minimized if it cannot be overcome. Laws concerning marriage and divorce decrease the danger of women's sexuality by providing for the acquisition and relinquishment of male rights to that sexuality. Marriage brings the "wild and unruly potentialities of female sexuality" under control by designating a woman's sexuality as a particular man's possession.⁴

The control of women's sexuality and its role in the institution of the family, the normativeness of heterosexuality, and the energy/control paradigm of sexuality are all connected pieces of a patriarchal understanding of sexuality. Where women's sexuality is seen as an object to be possessed, and sexuality itself is perceived as solely heterosexual and

as an impulse that can take possession of the self, the central issues surrounding sexuality will necessarily be issues of control. The question then becomes how a positive Jewish feminist discourse about sexuality can move beyond this patriarchal framework, not only rejecting its ethical implications but also defining sexuality in fundamentally different terms.

A FEMINIST VIEW

In the past twenty years, feminists have reconceptualized the nature and functions of human sexuality, generating alternatives to the energy/control model that potentially establish our thinking about sexuality on new foundations. Rather than seeing sexuality as a separate and alien energy that can engulf the self, feminists have described it as part of a continuum of embodied self-expression or as part of a spectrum of erotic energy that ideally suffuses all activities in our lives.⁵

Audre Lorde, in her brilliant essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," describes the erotic as the life force, the capacity for feeling, the capacity for joy, a power we are taught to fear and ignore by a society that "defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need." The erotic is a source of empowerment, a "lens through which we [can] scrutinize all aspects of our existence," evaluating them "honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives."⁶

Ethicist Beverly Harrison similarly interprets sexuality as a reality rooted in "our bodies, our selves." Setting out the base points for a feminist moral theology, Harrison argues that "all our knowledge, including our moral knowledge, is body-mediated knowledge." Our sensuality, or our capacity for feeling, is the foundation stone of our connection to the world, the prerequisite without which we would lose all ability to act or to value. Our sexuality, as an aspect of our embodiedness and inherent in it, is one especially intense dimension of our body-mediated power, of the body space that is "literally the ground of our personhood."⁷

This view of sexuality as part of a spectrum of body/life energy rather than a special force or evil inclination has at least two important implications for understanding the place of sexuality in human life. First of all, it challenges the value of control by suggesting that we cannot suppress sexual feelings without suppressing our capacity for feeling more generally. If sexuality is one dimension of our ability to live passionately in the world, then in cutting off our sexuality, we diminish our overall power to feel, know, and value deeply. While the connection between sexuality and feeling does not compel us to act out all our sexual feelings, it does mean we must honor and make room for feelings — including sexual ones — as "the basic ingredient in our relational transaction with the world."⁸ Second, insofar as sexuality is an element in the embodiment

that mediates our relation to reality, an aspect of the life energy that enables us to connect with others in creativity and joy, sexuality is profoundly connected to spirituality, indeed is inseparable from it. Sexuality is that part of us through which we reach out to other persons and to God, expressing the need for relationship, for the sharing of self and of meaning.⁹ When we touch that place in our lives where sexuality and spirituality come together, we touch our wholeness and the fullness of our power, and at the same time our connection with a power larger than ourselves.¹⁰

RETHINKING AMBIVALENT ATTITUDES

Feminist reconceptualizations of the energy/control model of sexuality and affirmation of the profound connection between sexuality and spirituality provide directions for rethinking the ambivalent attitudes toward sexuality within Judaism.

Sexuality and Spirituality

Acceptance and avowal of a link between sex and spirit is by no means foreign to Jewish experience. In the mysteries of the marriage bed on Sabbath night; in the sanctity of the Song of Songs; for mysticism, in the very nature and dynamics of the Godhead, sexual expression is an image of and path to the holy.¹¹ Yet again and again in theology and practice, Judaism turns away from and undermines this acknowledged connection by defining sexuality in terms of patriarchal possession and control. Since such categories are inimical to the mutuality, openness, and vulnerability in sexual relations that tie sexuality to the sacred, a feminist approach to sexuality must reconstruct both the institutional and conceptual bases for linking sexuality with the spiritual.

It is striking that one of the profoundest images of freedom and mutuality in sexual relations that the Jewish tradition has to offer is at the same time its central image of the connection between sexuality and spirituality. Unlike the Garden of Eden, where Eve and Adam are ashamed of their nakedness and women's subordination is the punishment for sin, the Garden of the Song of Songs is a place of sensual delight and sexual equality. Unabashed by their desire, the man and woman of these poems delight in their own embodiment and the beauty surrounding them, each seeking the other out to inaugurate their meetings, each rejoicing in the love without dominion that is also the love of God.¹² Since this book offers a vision of delight that is easier to achieve in a sacred garden than in the midst of daily demands, it is perhaps no criticism of the institution of marriage that the couple in the Song of

Songs is not married. Yet the picture of mutuality and the sacredness of mutuality offered by this book stand in fundamental tension with the structures of marriage as Judaism defines them. When the central rituals of marriage and divorce celebrate or enact the male possession and release of female sexuality and exclude the possibility of loving same-sex relationships, what are the supports and resources for the true reciprocity of intimate exchange that marks the holiness of Song of Songs? The achievement of mutuality in the marriage bed is extremely difficult in the absence of justice in those institutions that legitimate and surround it.

Transformation of the Legal Framework of Marriage

A first concrete task, then, of the feminist reconstruction of Jewish attitudes towards sexuality is the radical transformation of the institutional legal framework within which sexual relations are supposed to take place. Insofar as Judaism maintains its interest in the establishment of enduring relationships outside a patriarchal framework, these relationships will be entered into and dissolved by mutual initiative and consent. "Marriage" will not be about the transfer of women or the sanctification of potential disorder through the firm establishment of women in the patriarchal family, but [about the] the decision of two adults — any two adults — to make their lives together, lives which include the sharing of sexuality. Although in the modern West, it is generally assumed that such a commitment constitutes a central meaning of marriage, this assumption is contradicted by a religious (and secular) legal system that outlaws homosexual marriage and institutionalizes inequality in its basic definitions of marriage and divorce.

This redefinition of the legal framework of marriage is based both on rejection of the institutionalization of heterosexuality and on the important principle that sexuality is not something we can acquire or possess in another. We are each the possessor of our own sexuality — in Adrienne Rich's phrase, the "presiding genius" of our own bodies.¹³ The sharing of sexuality with another is something that should happen only by mutual consent, a consent that is not a blanket permission, but that is continually renewed in the actual rhythms of particular relationships. This principle, simple as it seems, challenges both the fundamental assumptions of Jewish marriage law and the Jewish understanding of what women's sexuality is "about." It defines as immoral legal regulations concerning the possession, control, and exchange of women's sexuality, and [it] disputes the perspective that a woman's sexuality is her contribution to the family rather than the expression of her own embodiment.

Moving Beyond Ourselves

If one firm principle for feminist thinking about sexuality is that no one can possess the sexuality of another, a second principle is that sexuality is not something that pertains only or primarily to the self. Indeed, our sexuality is fundamentally about moving out beyond ourselves. The connecting, communicative nature of sexuality is not something we can experience or look for only in sexual encounters narrowly defined, but in all real relationships in our lives. We live in the world as sexual beings. As Audre Lorde argues, our sexuality is a current that flows through all activities that are important to us, in which we invest our selves. True intellectual exchange, common work, shared experience, are laced with sexual energy that animates and enlivens them. The bonds of community are erotic bonds. The power that is generated by real community, that gives us access to a greater power that grounds and embraces us, is in part the power of our own sexual life energy that flows through community and enlarges and seals it. We are all, women and men, embodied sexual persons who respond sexually to the women and men among whom we live.

This erotic nature of community is by no means lost on Judaism; indeed, it is the subject of profound ambivalence in both the midrash and law. Extensive rabbinic legislation enforcing the separation of the sexes tries to protect against the feelings it recognizes, even as it acknowledges the sexual power of community. If the energy of community is erotic, there are no guarantees that eroticism will stay within prescribed legal boundaries rather than breaking out and disrupting communal sanctity. The strict "fence around the law" that is necessary when it comes to sexual behavior is itself testimony to the power of sexuality.

It is tempting for a feminist account of sexuality to deny the power of the erotic, depicting the rabbinic fear of it as simply misplaced. But it is truer to experience to acknowledge the power of sexuality to overturn rules and threaten boundaries. Then feminists can embrace this power as a significant ally. There is no question that the empowerment that comes from owning the erotic in our lives can disturb community and undermine familiar structures. On the level of sexual behavior, if we allow ourselves to perceive and acknowledge sexual feelings, there is always the danger we may act on them, and they may not correspond to group consensus about whom we may desire and when. And when we understand the erotic not simply as sexual feeling in the narrow sense but as our fundamental life energy, owning this power in our lives is even more threatening to established structure.

In Audre Lorde's terms, if we allow the erotic to become a lens through which we evaluate all aspects of our existence, we can no longer "settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe."¹⁴ Having glimpsed the possibility of genuine satisfaction in work well done, we are less likely to settle for work that is alienating and meaningless. Having experienced the power and legitimacy of our own sexual desire, we are less likely to subscribe to a system that closely and absolutely prescribes and proscribes the channels of that desire. Having experienced our capacity for creative and joyful action, we are less likely to accept hierarchical power relationships that deny or restrict our ability to bring that creativity and joy to other aspects of our lives. It may be that the ability of women to live within the patriarchal family and the larger patriarchal structures that govern Jewish life depends on our suppression of the erotic, on our numbing ourselves to the sources of vision and power that fuel meaningful resistance. Obviously, from a patriarchal perspective, then, erotic empowerment is dangerous. That is why, in Lorde's words, "we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex," and that is why we are also taught to restrain our sexuality, so that it too fits the parameters of hierarchical control that govern the rest of our lives.¹⁵

NURTURING THE EROTIC

From a feminist perspective, however, the power and danger of the erotic are not reasons to fear and suppress it but to nurture it as a profound personal and communal resource in the struggle for change. When "we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of," we carry with us an inner knowledge of the kind of world we are seeking to create.¹⁶ If we repress this knowledge because it also makes us sexually alive, then we repress the clarity and creative energy that is the basis of our capacity to envision and work toward a more just social order.

This understanding of the power of the erotic is a particularly crucial corrective to rabbinic attitudes toward sexual control. The rabbis recognized the connection between the sexual impulse and human creativity. "The bigger the man, the bigger the *yetzer*," they said, and advised, "Hold him [the *yetzer hara*] off with the left hand and draw him nigh with the right."¹⁷ Yet at the same time they acknowledged the role of sexuality as an ingredient in all activity, they apparently believed one could constantly guard against sexuality without damaging the larger capacity to act and to feel. To love God with all the heart meant to love God with the good *and evil* impulses, and yet it was imagined one could rein in the evil impulse without diminishing the love of God.¹⁸ If we

take sexuality seriously, however, as an expression of our embodiment that cannot be disconnected from our wider ability to interact feelingly with the world, then to learn fear and shame of our own bodies and those of others — even when these feelings are intermixed with other conflicting attitudes — is to learn suspicion of feeling as a basic way of valuing and knowing. We should not expect, then, to be able to block out our sexual feelings without blocking out the longing for social relations rooted in mutuality rather than hierarchy, without blocking out the anger that warns us that something is amiss in our present social arrangements, without blocking and distorting the fullness of our love for God.¹⁹

Living Dangerously

I am not arguing here for free sex or for more sexual expression, quantitatively speaking. I am arguing for living dangerously, for choosing to take responsibility for working through the possible consequences of sexual feeling rather than repressing sexual feeling and thus feeling more generally. I am arguing that our capacity to transform Judaism and the world is rooted in our capacity to be alive to the pain and anger that is caused by relationships of domination and to the joy that awaits us on the other side. I am arguing that to be alive is to be sexually alive and that in suppressing one sort of vitality we suppress the other. The question becomes then: Can we affirm our sexuality as the gift it is, making it sacred not by cordoning off pieces of it, but by increasing our awareness of the ways in which it connects us to all things? Can we stop evicting our sexuality from the synagogue, hiding it behind a *mechitzah* or praying with our heads, and instead bring it in, offering it to God in the experience of full spiritual/physical connection? Dare we trust our capacity for joy — knowing it is related to our sexuality — to point the direction toward new and different ways of structuring communal life?

Obviously, I am suggesting that the implications of a changed conception of sexuality go well beyond the sexual sphere, and yet it is also the case, of course, that they shape that sphere as well. The ability to feel deeply in the whole of our lives affects what we want and are willing to accept in the bedroom, just as what we experience in the bedroom prepares us for mutuality or domination in the rest of our lives. A new understanding of sexuality and a transformed institutional context for sexual relationships will have significant impact on personal sexual norms. If the traditional models and categories for understanding sexuality are no longer morally acceptable from a feminist perspective, but sexuality is fundamentally about relationships with others, what values might govern sexual behavior for modern Jews?

Mutuality, Respect, and Empowerment

To see sexuality as an aspect of our life energy, as part of a continuum with other ways of relating to the world and other persons, is to insist that the norms of mutuality, respect for difference, and joint empowerment that characterize the larger feminist vision of community apply also — indeed especially — to the area of sexuality. If in our general communal life we seek to be present with each other in such a way that we can touch the greater power of being in which all communities dwell, how much more should this be true in those relationships that are potentially the most open, intimate, and vulnerable in our lives?

The unification of sexuality and spirituality provides an ideal of what a sexual relationship can be, an ideal that is more a measure of the possible than the continuing reality of everyday. What keeps this ideal alive as a recurring possibility is the exercise of respect, responsibility, and honesty — commensurate with the nature and depth of the particular relationship — as basic values in any sexual connection. In terms of concrete life choices, I believe that radical mutuality is most fully possible in the context of an ongoing committed relationship in which sexual expression is one dimension of a shared life. Long-term partnerships may be the richest setting for negotiating and living out the meanings of mutuality, responsibility, and honesty amidst the distractions, problems, and pleasures of every day.

Such partnerships are not, however, a choice for all adults who want them and not all adults would choose them, given the possibility. To respond within a feminist framework to the realities of different life decisions and at the same time affirm the importance of sexual well-being as an aspect of our total well-being, we need to apply certain fundamental values to a range of sexual styles and choices. While honesty, responsibility, and respect are goods that pertain to any relationship, the concrete meaning of these values will vary considerably depending on the duration and significance of the connection involved. In one relationship, honesty may mean complete and open sharing of feelings and experiences; in another, clarity about intent for that encounter. In the context of a committed partnership, responsibility may signify lifelong presence, trust, and exchange; in a brief encounter, discussion of birth control, condoms, and AIDS. At its fullest, respect may mean regard for another as a total person; at a minimum, absence of pressure or coercion and a commitment, in Lorde's words, not to "look away" as we come together.²⁰ If we need to look away, then we should walk away: the same choices about whether and how to act on our feelings that pertain to any area of moral decision making are open to us in relation to our sexuality.

5. How to Win Friends & Influence People

Exodus 18:6-27

8 Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had saved them.

9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 He said, "Praise be to the Lord, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." 12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"

15 Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and instructions."

17 Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. 19 Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. 20 Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. 21 But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 22 Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. 23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

24 Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. 25 He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 26 They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

27 Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

“The Rules: Time-Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right” (1995)

1. Be a “Creature Unlike Any Other”
2. Don't Talk to a Man First (and Don't Ask Him to Dance)
3. Don't Stare at Men or Talk Too Much
4. Don't Meet Him Halfway or Go Dutch on a Date
5. Don't Call Him and Rarely Return His Calls
6. Always End Phone Calls First
7. Don't Accept a Saturday Night Date after Wednesday
8. Fill Up Your Time before the Date
9. How to Act on Dates 1, 2, and 3
10. How to Act on Dates 4 through Commitment Time
11. Always End the Date First
12. Stop Dating Him if He Doesn't Buy You a Romantic Gift for Your Birthday or Valentine's Day
13. Don't See Him More than Once or Twice a Week
14. No More than Casual Kissing on the First Date
15. Don't Rush into Sex and Other *Rules* for Intimacy
16. Don't Tell Him What to Do
17. Let Him Take the Lead
18. Don't Expect a Man to Change or Try to Change Him
19. Don't Open Up Too Fast
20. Be Honest but Mysterious
21. Accentuate the Positive and Other *Rules* for Personal Ads
22. Don't Live with a Man (or Leave Your Things in His Apartment)
23. Don't Discuss *The Rules* with Your Therapist
24. Don't Break *The Rules*
25. Do *The Rules* and You'll Live Happily Ever After!
26. Love Only Those Who Love You
27. Be Easy to Live With

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5. Most People Are Lonely: Help Them Feel Connected

Robin Williams was one of the most celebrated actors and most successful personalities of all time. Millions of people admired him, thousands knew and loved him, and dozens felt close to him. Yet in August 2014 Robin Williams took his own life. Despite all that love and success, Williams was profoundly lonely.

The same night Robin Williams died, I attended a party at a bar in downtown New York City to support an editor friend of mine. With my wife having gone home already, I planned to make a quick appearance at the party, say hi to my friend, and leave. But I needed to charge my cell phone before heading home, and so I asked someone at the party where I could charge it. She sent me downstairs, where I plugged in the phone and sat down on a couch to wait. Next to me sat Jackie, a thirty-one-year-old employee of one of the sponsors of the party, who had consumed a few alcoholic beverages before I sat down.

"Tell me about yourself," I said to Jackie, and that really was all I had to say. In the twenty minutes that followed, while my phone's battery charged, I learned Jackie's story. Always the bridesmaid, never the bride, Jackie was sad not to have a partner with whom to share her life. She had achieved great success in her career, rising through the ranks at her current company, but she told me that something was missing. Jackie told me about her career ambitions and her fears and challenges. She told me about her dreams and her goals and her love of travel—and nearly every place she'd ever traveled to.

I had barely said a thing except my initial "Tell me about yourself" and then a few words to acknowledge that I was listening. Yet Jackie opened up to me as if we were the best of friends. Perhaps she was

lonely, perhaps she was really seeking a connection, it's hard to say for sure. But what happened next was truly shocking.

"You were really great to talk to," I said. "But I'm afraid I've got to get going." I turned to the waiter to retrieve my phone, and Jackie realized she'd been doing all the talking.

"Oh, my goodness, I'm so sorry. I haven't asked a thing about you. Traveling anywhere interesting soon?" asked a sobering-up Jackie.

"Actually, I'm going to San Francisco next week for my wife's birthday."

"Oh, I love San Francisco!" she replied. "I'm there all the time for work."

"Got any connections in French Laundry by chance?" I asked. You see, I had been trying to get into the exclusive Napa Valley fine dining establishment for months in the lead-up to the trip.

"As a matter of fact, I do!" Jackie replied enthusiastically. "Let me make a phone call and see what I can do."

The next week I was dining in style with my wife in Yountville, tasting scrumptious delights at one of the hardest-to-get-into restaurants in the country. On one hand, I had done nothing but ask a stranger for help to get this special unexpected night. On the other hand, I had dedicated real time—twenty minutes of my life—to helping fill a void of loneliness in someone's life, something that perhaps rarely happened for her.

Listen to understand, authentically try to connect deeply with people, help them feel less lonely, and you will find yourself far more able to influence them.

The key to this lesson, as in many of the lessons in this book, is to do this *authentically*. This means not helping people feel less lonely in order to influence them but because it's the right thing to do. I had no idea, of course, that Jackie had connections at French Laundry. I didn't even expect the topic to come up in conversation. Instead, I listened and connected and helped her feel less lonely. If

only for a few moments, and that happened to lead to my getting exactly what I most wanted at the time.

Even the most well-adjusted, psychologically healthy individuals have moments when they feel lonely and long to be more connected to other human beings. By approaching people with the intent to understand them and more deeply connect to them, we differentiate ourselves from most people in the world, who don't care or are too busy worrying about their own problems to spend time focusing on others. When we do focus on others and help them feel less lonely, a world of opportunities opens up for us.

FAST First Action Steps to Take:

1. Practice this with three people: two relative strangers and one friend or family member. With each person, ask questions, listen, and seek to understand and connect with that person on a deeper level.
2. Initiate at least one conversation at work in which you ask about deeper topics than you'd normally discuss (if appropriate). Let the other person be a bit vulnerable and share your own vulnerability as well. Note afterward whether you feel a stronger connection with this person and whether you'd feel more comfortable asking him for something another day.

26. The Paradox of Persuasion: Shut Up

Dave, look, I like your passion and excitement for Dunkin' Donuts, and it sounds like you have a lot of really interesting, exciting things to offer with Radio Disney," said Shannon, a longtime marketing lead for the Dunkin' Donuts brand who was based in Massachusetts. "But I can barely get a word in here. How can you learn about our specific marketing needs if you do all the talking in this conversation?"

I was so embarrassed when I heard this. I had worked really hard as a persistent salesperson for Disney by incessantly calling both Shannon and her gatekeeper assistant, Betty, to get this face-to-face opportunity, and now I was blowing it by talking too much.

That was a mistake I made often early in my sales career, and it's one I still occasionally make as an entrepreneur and CEO. There is no question that many of the best salespeople and the best leaders are filled with passion, positivity, ideas, and enthusiasm. Those qualities serve us well in many cases. Our passion and enthusiasm are contagious, for instance, and as a result many people want to be around us.

But these strengths sometimes come with a nasty side effect. Often, precisely because we get so passionate and excited about an idea, an opportunity, or a product, we can't seem to stop running our mouths about it. The result is that once the people who wanted to be around us so badly are actually around us, they pretty quickly start wishing we'd just shut up and listen. As Dale Carnegie wisely explained:

If you want to know how to make people shun you and laugh at you behind your back and even despise you, here is the recipe: Never listen to anyone for long. Talk incessantly about yourself. If you have an idea while the other person is talking, don't

wait for him or her to finish; bust right in and interrupt in the middle of a sentence.

The point is that to influence others, you have to know when to shut up and listen.

It may sound like the ultimate paradox that listening to others is the key to influencing them, but for those who are not yet convinced, here is a recap of all the reasons listening is so much more powerful than talking:

1. Listening allows you to understand the person you want to influence so that you can tap into his unique goals, dreams, needs, and wants.
2. Listening gives the other person an opportunity to feel heard, which often leads to feeling appreciated and respected and even liked or loved. It is much easier to influence someone who's feeling this way.
3. Listening gives you an opportunity to think. We can listen three times faster than we can talk, and so listening gives us extra time to think, prepare, and reframe what we want on the basis of what we're hearing.
4. Listening, along with mirroring and validation, helps lonely people feel connected and great. This is even more contagious and powerful than feeling great around a positive, high-energy talker.
5. Listening increases the chances that the other person will talk about her pain or her organization's pain, that is, the problem that you can try to solve.

No matter what you have to say, offer, sell, or convince someone of, it is always more effective to demonstrate genuine, authentic interest in the other person by listening and asking questions and then listening some more than it is to talk at that person. Of course,

BEING POLITE EXTROVERT VS INTROVERT



Sure, I'll come in and chat for a bit. You're worth my time.



I'd better get going. I know how busy you are, and I don't want to inconvenience you.



I'd love to stay for dinner. If I said no, I'd be insulting your cooking.



Oh, I couldn't possibly! You weren't expecting me, so there would be less food for your family.



It's nice to meet you! Tell me about your family? Your job? Your hobbies? I'm interested in getting to know you.



It's nice to meet you. [I won't ask any personal questions because I don't want to seem like I'm prying.]



I feel like I owe you the respect of having this hard discussion face-to-face.



I feel like this discussion will be calmer, clearer, and more civil if it's handled via email.



I know you had a stressful day, so I'm calling to check on you.



I know you had a stressful day, so I'm going to give you some space.

@introvertdoodles

6. Jewish Antinomianism

Heretics are often thought of as “unbelievers,” but in fact, they are true believers – their beliefs just differ from the majority’s. Often, heretical movements are described as “antinomian” because they deliberately transgress religious laws. But *why* do they do so? Here, we’ll look at some of the different types of antinomianism, focusing on the heresy of Jacob Frank (a kind of echo of Sabbetai Tzvi) and his text *The Words of the Lord* (1784). If we have time, we’ll also look at Reb Zalman’s *Renewal is not Heresy* (2001).

1. Types of Antinomianism

Imagine each of these types in specific cases:

- a) Eating a cheeseburger
- b) Having non-marital sex
- c) Reading a forbidden book of Kabbalah

1. Nihilism: life is without value or meaning.
2. Skeptical/ethical antinomianism: the law simply isn’t true or is connected to false claims.
3. Humanistic antinomianism: the law thwarts human (personal, spiritual, psychological, etc) flourishing
4. Religious antinomianism: there is another positive religious value more important than the law
5. Experiential antinomianism: breaking the law has an experiential or even magical impact.

2. Jacob Frank (1726-91)

Now let’s apply these types to Frank.

1066. It astonishes me when the world prays and begs for places they have heard about but have not seen with their own eyes.

223. All the teachings that have come forth so far are exactly like that dog who vomited then swallowed again. (Proverbs 26:11)

219. Jacob honored his Lord at the [place of] a foreign god. (Gen. 28:10) So must we honor our Lord, but how? This is how, to discard all laws, religions, *etc.* and follow me step by step.

1156. To serve another God is one thing; to walk that road which is directed, is another thing.

66. Whoever wants to be attached to the living God has to be virtuous, and display all kinds of good qualities towards God and man, and do good by everyone as much as possible. I repeat, he must have dignity, even through trials and tribulations, he has to be constant in his heart, and not change in either direction.



18. In Salonika there is a Congregation called the Congregation of the Prophet Elijah. After having met the *szkolnik* [shammos] of this kahal I asked him, “Why do you call this *shul* Elijah's Congregation?”

“One of my ancestors,” answered the Jew, “having come to it after the Sabbath had ended, found the prophet Elijah sitting there on a chair; therefore from that moment on this shul was called Elijah's kahal and it was decided that our family would subsequently hold the position of gabbai without interruption.”

Having heard that, I knocked the Jew down and started to kill him, saying, “I am also an honorable Jew, show me Elijah right away.”

The Turks, hearing the shouting, came running towards us and asked the reason for the beating. I told them the whole matter, adding, “Well, tell me, would you believe this either until you yourselves should see Elijah? Why shouldn't I order him to show him to me?”

“Right, right,” they shouted unanimously. “Beat him, go on, beat him.”

977. It was said to Abraham: ‘Go, go from your country,’ and then to you too it was said. That means that you should go forth from those rituals which you have kept in the Jewish religion—like fasting, mourning, cursing, pretense, one beating another—for all those things are from the side of death... I led you to Esau, where all the kings and their children are among delights and pay no heed to mourning. I led you to life.

1292, All those who don't have God, let them learn laws. God gave lands to Abraham, not laws.

988. Your way is not my way, for you fasted for your gods and lay upon the earth in mourning... But I am not so. When my help comes to me, I will furnish my court and conduct it in gala dress. I will give all sorts of parties with food and drink. I will have my own musicians, theatre with its actors, and all will dance and rejoice in common, young and old alike, and that which stands will be fulfilled...

102. There is a certain tree whose lofty branches spread beyond the walls which are set about it nearby. One standing outside thinks that there are very many trees, but one who is inside sees that only one tree is there. This is what we should know, and pursue just one tree and not search for many.

15. When I was in Salonika the second time I received an order to perform contrary deeds. So when I met a Turk on a Greek street I drew a sword and forced him to speak the names of the First and the Second [Sabbetai Sevi and Baruchiah Russo] and to make the sign of the cross, and then I did not let him go until he did it. Then, meeting a Greek in a Turkish street I forced him to say the words, *Mahomet Surullah*, (Muhammad is the true prophet) and also the names of the first Two and ordered him to lift one finger upward according to the Mahometan custom. And again when I met a Jew he had to make the sign of the cross for me and also pronounce those two names when this happened in a Greek street, while when I met him in a Turkish street then he had to raise one finger upwards and name those two names. And I was performing these deeds daily.



96. A certain princess of lesser rank than a prince wanted to have him as her husband. She sent [a message] to his father that he give her his son, threatening otherwise to go to war with him.

Seeking to avoid any conflict, the king summoned his gardener and having given him a convoy, sent him to her. The princess, waiting for the one she fancied, ordered the whole road in that region as far as her palace to be laid with the very richest cloth. The gardener, when riding, noticed it and gave the order to turn aside so as not to damage such costly cloth. When he arrived, the princess took him to her garden where she ordered the trees set the wrong way, all the flower pots turned over *etc.* Unable to bear it anymore the gardener, trying not to reveal his art, begins to say this is bad, that is not good, this must stand so, that otherwise. The princess realized right away that this is no knight of royal blood. She sent him back and threatens [war] if they do not provide the true prince.

The king tries it again and sends his chef. That one also seeing the road covered with cloth orders the expedition off the road. Having come to the kitchen and having found something or other not in order, [he] began to argue about the kitchen, according to his ways. The princess recognized him also, sent him back with the final warning that war was imminent.

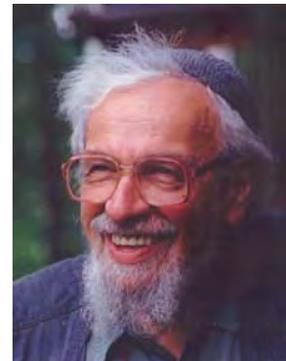
Frantic, the king sends his real son. That one goes right over the material on the road, being used to it, noticing nothing. The queen [!] then recognizes the true one and unites with him. So it is with you. You should have trod on all laws, those which have been given.

2. Reb Zalman

From *Renewal is Not Heresy*, transcription of teachings from 2001.

1.

If you really believe in Divine providence, then can you believe that Jesus of Nazareth is simply an escapee from Divine providence? Was Gautama the Buddha also only an oversight? If there is a living God, then it is impossible that a n'shamah klalit (an inclusive soul) such as Y'hoshu'a of Nazareth, through whom countless people had a bridge to the living God, was an "oops" of God, that God wasn't paying attention at the time when Mary got pregnant?



Now, what I am saying here may seem like terrible heresy at first. However, I want to make the case for this change of perspective based on an appreciation of the limitations of the traditional model. Given the paradigm shift which we are now experiencing, the old model can inform our thinking but is no longer sufficient in and of itself. In that model which worked well until now, mashiach is always the leader of the good against the evil.... Death is bad and, at the end, all bad will disappear and the evil people will get what they deserve. They will go into the fire of hell and we, the Jews, will be finally vindicated. It is this kind of approach to what mashiach means that I can no longer sustain. I can no longer pretend that I believe in the ultimate reality of dualism. All of what happens in this world takes place within a single system which includes both what we call the good and evil.

2.

The power of this [sexually] repressive message was very great and, from the perspective of someone in the 1600's, universally pervasive. On the other hand, what is it that makes *davvenen* so exciting? It is the same kind of urge, a longing and yearning for the Divine Beloved. Since the

object of longing could no longer be a physical beloved, the object of the longing gets sublimated... Needing to put that longing someplace, it gets invested in the messianic. Loving the mashiach is acceptable and if, within the circles of those who believe in and are therefore freed by the mashiach, it is possible to enjoy sex in a way not possible before, and not only within marriage, then you can have a sense of the power of this person and possibility.

We experienced some of that power in the 1960s. It was in the air; it was strong and thick. It was something like the vernalizing of seed – when you take seed and it has to get kicked into starting to grow. It's almost as if the "Greening of America," the beginning of a certain consciousness, was vernalized by the fantastic "itch" that was around for those of us who lived through the sixties. This may be another way for some of us to get a glimpse of what it felt like at the time of Shabtai Zvi, how powerful that must have been....

3.

On one level, then, it can be said that we are greater heretics than the Sabbatians. The Sabbatians at least bought into the reality map of Luria and played the game according to those rules. They said, "Do you want to release sparks? We can show you how to release sparks the way it can be done in the messianic period... All you need to do is plunge into the depth of that evil, maintaining your consciousness and all its fervor. Then, pull out that spark, experience the experience, take it back, offer it to God!" They had a fantastic sense of the drama involved in entering into and experiencing that which had always been called so evil that it had to be avoided by everyone without exception.

But this was still the old, static stage on which they were playing... If, in some ways, we are more heretical than the Sabbatians because we accept a changed reality map, I also believe that there are other ways in which we represent an improvement. We share a real concern about what will happen to the Jewish people in this new age... I have the feeling that the best, the juiciest stuff of yiddishkeit is bubbling in Jewish renewal and that we are where the sap is flowing. We are committed to the continuation of Judaism.

3. Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck"

First having read the book of myths,
and loaded the camera,
and checked the edge of the knife-blade,
I put on
the body-armor of black rubber
the absurd flippers
the grave and awkward mask.
I am having to do this
not like Cousteau with his
assiduous team
aboard the sun-flooded schooner
but here alone.

There is a ladder.
The ladder is always there
hanging innocently
close to the side of the schooner.
We know what it is for,
we who have used it.
Otherwise
it is a piece of maritime floss
some sundry equipment.

I go down.
Rung after rung and still
the oxygen immerses me
the blue light
the clear atoms
of our human air.
I go down.
My flippers cripple me,
I crawl like an insect down the ladder
and there is no one
to tell me when the ocean
will begin.

First the air is blue and then
it is bluer and then green and then
black I am blacking out and yet
my mask is powerful
it pumps my blood with power
the sea is another story
the sea is not a question of power
I have to learn alone
to turn my body without force
in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget
what I came for
among so many who have always
lived here
swaying their crenellated fans
between the reefs
and besides
you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.
The words are purposes.
The words are maps.
I came to see the damage that was done
and the treasures that prevail.

I stroke the beam of my lamp
slowly along the flank
of something more permanent
than fish or weed

the thing I came for:
the wreck and not the story of the wreck
the thing itself and not the myth
the drowned face always staring
toward the sun
the evidence of damage
worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty
the ribs of the disaster
curving their assertion
among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.
And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair
streams black, the merman in his armored body.
We circle silently
about the wreck
we dive into the hold.
I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes
whose breasts still bear the stress
whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies
obscurely inside barrels
half-wedged and left to rot
we are the half-destroyed instruments
that once held to a course
the water-eaten log
the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are
by cowardice or courage
the one who find our way
back to this scene
carrying a knife, a camera
a book of myths
in which
our names do not appear.

Rabbi Fred Neulander, Statement to Jury

This is Rabbi Fred J. Neulander's statement to a Monmouth County jury in the penalty phase of his murder trial as recorded by The New York Times, November 22, 2002. Neulander had been convicted of hiring a hit man to kill his wife. I'm interested in the morally neutral (here, immoral) deployment of rabbinic rhetoric, and the question of authenticity/mask in Neulander's presentation.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I am here to offer a plea for my life. Somehow I think it was very fortuitous that yesterday I did not have the opportunity to address you. The room was filled with emotion. I was filled with emotion. And I'm not sure that I could have spoken. I'm not sure I could have even spoken, period — physically. And I'm definitely sure that I could not have spoken cogently. Mr. Riley and Mr. Lynch yesterday spoke to you of requesting your cogency, your wisdom, your thought, your analytic gifts in making this very difficult decision.

This is a matter of moment and moments that matter. And I'm going to ask and request the same things of you. However, unlike these two gentlemen, I am not competent and comfortable in the mechanisms of the law, the language of the law, the behavior pattern in a courtroom and rather than assume something I should not and cannot, let me suggest that I would like to take something from my tradition and see if I can make things more understandable and certainly my request more understandable.

At the end of the book of Genesis there's a wonderful, wonderful dialogue between Pharaoh and Patriarch Jacob. This is not the Pharaoh of Exodus, not the vile and brutal Pharaoh that Moses has to confront. This is the Pharaoh of Joseph, a gentle man and a wonderful thinker. I hope you will agree with me in a few seconds.

They meet because, and you remember the story that Joseph and Jacob are reconciled after many, many years. Joseph goes up, rescues his father and family from the famine in Canaan and brings them down to Egypt, where there is food.

And because Joseph is a grand vizier or whatever title he had, he was certainly the second in command in Egypt. He was the Dick Cheney of ancient Egypt. And because of that most likely Jacob has this interview, Jacob probably has an audience with the Pharaoh. And the Pharaoh asks a question at the outset, at the outset of this discussion. It seems if you're not careful, not careful to read the Hebrew, it seems rather shallow and nothing very important.

He asks as an introductory remark, Pharaoh asks Jacob, he says, "I'd like to know how old you are." But it's said in a very remarkable way. Usually when there's a locution or even when there's a statement, the normal pattern in Hebrew — when you do it in translation — the normal pattern would be to say, "How many are the years of your life?" The question of

how old are you — the quantity of your years. Pharoah doesn't ask that, not that way. He asks, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" That's why you have to be careful. When he uses that word "the days of the years of your life," our great commentators, our great scholars, our great interpreters tell us that there's a message. That what's critical is not quantity but the question is what did you do with the days of your life? How did you fill your days? How did you make a difference in the world? Were you selfish or were you generous with your time? Were you using the best parts of your brain or were you lazy and sloppy? Did you have a vision for the community or were you self-deceiving and looking only inwards?

That now is not an issue of the quantity of your years but it's an issue of a quality of your experience. And I would like to use that as a benchmark for that which I speak to you of myself in the past, in the present and in the future. A benchmark for the past, my past, my present and my future, which is in your hands and you know that.

If I look at the days of the years of my life before the first of November of 1994, they were filled with great blessings. They were filled with people that made a difference in my life and I hope I made a difference in their lives. They were filled with moments of satisfaction and purpose, I believe.

First and foremost, I had my wife, Carol. She was a remarkable woman. She was bright. She had a sense of balance. She had the ability to understand people and things so very quickly. It's a gift. And she used it with skill, she used it adroitly. Carol also had the rare gift, rare in this day and age, she had great common sense. She applied it to things that affected her, things that affected me and things that affected us.

This was a gracious hostess. This was a gracious guest. Ellen Goodman sat in this chair and said something very important. She made the bad times better. She made the good times better. And I think that's very, very accurate.

And Carol had grit. By that I mean fortitude. Carol Neulander, my wife, started a business with no background in business and no training in business. She started a bakery with no background in baking and no training in baking. And what emerged from her efforts and her vision was unquestionably a bakery that was recognized as second to none in the entire Delaware Valley. Great, great, great.

And Carol Neulander had class. Not classy because that doesn't even come close. When you were in the company of Carol Neulander, you knew you were in the company of a lady and you behaved like that. And yet she wasn't distant. You could approach her easily. She had the same kind of pleasure and fun with some of the men and women in the back of the bakery in the production department as she did when she sat with the governor of New Jersey. That was her wonderful, warm ability.

And I miss her, and I loved her and I love her.

Now there are those among us who would behind their hands would snicker. I have acknowledged for the longest time my behavior that was reprehensible and my behavior

that was disgraceful. And note that that's a theological word, disgraceful. And yet you must believe I loved her and love her.

And I wanted to spend the days of the years of my life — long days of long years of my life — with her. We had a little dialogue that I'm sure each and every one of you has or that you might have with your close friend, with your beloved, with your husband, with your wife, with your partner. One of us would say to the other, "I want to grow old with you." And the other would lean over and whisper, "I want to grow old with you too, but let's do it slowly." I had in these days of the years of my life the privilege of watching three children emerge from the rigors and the difficulties of adolescence to become very special, very special young men and a woman. And they have grown beyond that into very successful persons, not because of what they might earn and not because of what positions they might hold but because they are successful persons first and foremost. And I watched that unfold.

I also watched the days of the years of my life unfold in what I have to consider the best congregation in the world. And that's not just hyperbole. These are people who want to study. These are people who want to develop their spiritual selves. They want to understand Judaism, hold on to Judaism, not let it slip through like sand slips through your hand.

These are people who were visionaries, they were leaders in the community in general. They were wonderful to work with. They had also great courage. They printed a prayer book. And I think Mr. Cohen referenced that yesterday.

If you put your name on something you had better believe it is an exceptionally quality item. And they did. Our problem with the prayer book is that it developed feet. We would start with a thousand prayer books we would order in the fall and by May or June we were down to about 500. Somehow people would always forget — it was that impressive a document. Some people would forget to return it. Everybody I talked to acknowledged, "Oh, yeah, I have one of your prayer books at home. I forgot to return it." And that was wonderful. The compliment was terrific. It was expensive but the compliment was wonderful.

And I had in those days of the years of my life the great good fortune to work in the community, working with the council for the mayor, working with interreligious conferences, working with Cooper Hospital in Camden. And probably next to the synagogue the most worthwhile communal program I have ever gotten involved with, I was on the founding board of the Ronald McDonald House of Southern New Jersey. A magnificent concept, doing magnificent work for people who have serious needs, emotional and physical. And those were the days of the years of my life before the first of November of 1994. From that moment on until Wednesday when you made your decision, the days of the years of my life were dark, unproductive, diminished. And I was not able to produce the kinds of things in my world where I would like to.

On Wednesday you brought that eight-year period to an end.

Starting today there is another sense of the days of the years of my life that will unfold. I do not know where I will be. Quite obviously, I don't know that. But wherever I will be there will be men who cannot read.

The legacy of illiteracy is striking and very sad and very limiting. I would hope that wherever I am, I would be able to teach a young man to read and then to be able to check in the newspaper what jobs are available and then be able to fill out an application and enrich the days of the years of his life.

Wherever I go, there will be a library and I hope I would be able to take whatever skills I bring and open the world of reading to people who would love it. And I have found in the past when all of a sudden when you take someone by the hand, help him open a book and so beautifully their world is enriched. And it can be anything, prose or poetry. It can be fiction or nonfiction. It can be world history, American history, Civil War history. It could be science fiction. It could be science.

The portals of a library are really gateways to all kinds of worlds and I would like very much the privilege, if you will give it to me, of helping people find those worlds that enthrall, that entice, that lift the spirit and lift the mind.

Wherever I go I will encounter young men who somehow have gotten lost in their high school career. And I have done this before — about two years ago. I have helped tutor a young man to get his high school equivalency certificate. It's called a G.E.D. I'm a good teacher. I was a good teacher. I can be a good teacher. And I want to help that young man. That will enhance the days of the years of my life by helping the days of the years of that young man's life.

I would like to be in a position to use whatever experiences I've had, whatever travel I may have enjoyed and enthrall and suggest to other people that they can do the same thing — learn from where they go, learn from the people they meet. I have heard and seen in the county jail men who have extraordinary talents — graphic artists, calligraphers, people who can make wonderful things on paper. Should they not be able to develop that talent? I have heard men sing with great power, with great beauty, with great gusto. And I would hope that somehow, not so dreamily, but that somehow I would be able to help that individual make something of the God-given talent he has.

That's all I want is that opportunity to teach. And that's why I'm here. I beseech you, I implore you, I beg of you for that privilege. And I promise, I promise that I will do whatever a teacher should do to enrich the lives of people that come in contact with that teacher.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you give me this privilege to redeem, to atone, what will happen is the days of the years of your life will indirectly be made more rich because you have given me the privilege in the days of the years of my life to reach out and change for the better the days of the years of the life of so many men I have yet to meet.

Thank you, ladies. Thank you, gentlemen.

7. The Gate of Tears: Embracing Difficult Emotions on the Spiritual Path

1.

It is a great mitzvah to be in *simchah* always.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav

2.

Even though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of tears are open.

Talmud Berachot 32b

3.

How we squander our hours of pain.

How we gaze beyond them into the bitter duration,
to see if they have an end.

Though they are nothing but our winter foliage, our dark evergreen,
one of the seasons of our inner year—not only season—but place, settlement, camp, soil,
dwelling.

Rilke, Tenth Duino Elegy

4.

The only thing that keeps us from happiness is searching for it.

Lama Surya Das

5.

I'm an old man now,

and a lonesome man in Kansas,

but not afraid to speak my lonesomeness... because it's not only my lonesomeness,
it's ours, all over America, O tender fellows, and spoken lonesomeness is prophecy.

Allen Ginsberg, "Wichita Vortex Sutra Part 3"

6.

You shall not mistreat a stranger, nor oppress him: for you were strangers in the land of
Egypt.

Exodus 22:21

7. One should note that Joseph often cried. In fact, there are no less than eight references in the Torah to him doing so. One who has suffered greatly in bad times will cry easily even in good times. His brothers, on the other hand, who had not suffered in their lives, did not even cry when the situation demanded that they should. And as Joseph even cried at the distress of others, he was worthy of attaining his high rank.

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin

8.

There is nothing so whole as a broken heart.

-Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotsk

Don't Listen

Jay Michaelson

Don't believe people like me
who make a religion of flaw
who offer imperfections as sacrifice
on piles of unhewn rock.

Don't believe teachers
who pass over cruelty and failure
Don't believe the arch, or the naked
And please, don't listen to sages

Don't trust anyone who says they're never lustful
And don't trust someone who is
Don't believe sophistication
And don't fall for the artless

Don't listen to me as I pray:
Thank you, God, for the collarbone and calves
for milk-white skin,
and olive...
as I offer my lust as prayer.

8. Religious Exemptions, Right-Wing Populism, and the Politics of Integration

Statement of Kim Davis

September 1, 2015

"I have worked in the Rowan County Clerk's office for 27 years as a Deputy Clerk and was honored to be elected as the Clerk in November 2014, and took office in January 2015. I love my job and the people of Rowan County. I have never lived any place other than Rowan County. Some people have said I should resign, but I have done my job well. This year we are on track to generate a surplus for the county of \$1.5 million.

In addition to my desire to serve the people of Rowan County, I owe my life to Jesus Christ who loves me and gave His life for me. Following the death of my godly mother-in-law over four years ago, I went to church to fulfill her dying wish. There I heard a message of grace and forgiveness and surrendered my life to Jesus Christ. I am not perfect. No one is. But I am forgiven and I love my Lord and must be obedient to Him and to the Word of God.

I never imagined a day like this would come, where I would be asked to violate a central teaching of Scripture and of Jesus Himself regarding marriage. To issue a marriage license which conflicts with God's definition of marriage, with my name affixed to the certificate, would violate my conscience. It is not a light issue for me. It is a Heaven or Hell decision. For me it is a decision of obedience. I have no animosity toward anyone and harbor no ill will. To me this has never been a gay or lesbian issue. It is about marriage and God's Word. It is a matter of religious liberty, which is protected under the First Amendment, the Kentucky Constitution, and in the Kentucky Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Our history is filled with accommodations for people's religious freedom and conscience. I want to continue to perform my duties, but I also am requesting what our Founders envisioned - that conscience and religious freedom would be protected. That is all I am asking. I never sought to be in this position, and I would much rather not have been placed in this position. I have received death threats from people who do not know me. I harbor nothing against them. I was elected by the people to serve as the County Clerk. I intend to continue to serve the people of Rowan County, but I cannot violate my conscience."

Dick Cheney Playboy Interview (excerpt)

Q: Do you have a philosophy of life?

A: I don't know. I don't think of it in those terms. I've had a very interesting life; I've loved it. It's been—if I could design how I'd spent the past 70 years, I'd be hard put to improve on it, just in terms of my personal satisfaction and family and Lynne and the kids. We just celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary in August. And I look back over those years, and they've been remarkable in every respect.



Who I am...

Journalist The Daily Beast, Forward
 Activist Jewish, LGBT + funder work
 Lawyer PRA, religious exemptions
 Academic PhD/Religion, teach at CTS
 Rabbi *The Gate of Tears*, meditation

He/Him

Outline

1. Yesterday: Segregation
2. Today: LGBTQ & RJ
3. Major players
4. Seven reasons religious exemptions are so harmful

Outline

1.
 Yesterday: Segregation

Themes

First Amendment:

Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...

Themes

“Free Exercise” clause is *always* in dialogue with civil rights.

Themes

Example:
Segregation

Themes

First, the Right tries to preserve the law/public morality/white supremacy

Then, when they lose the moral battle, they ask that the law not apply to them

Bob Jones U. (1983): Christian college loses tax-exempt status because of race-based admissions policy.

IS SEGREGATION SCRIPTURAL?

by
 Dr. Bob Jones, Sr.
 Founder
 BOB JONES University
 Greenville, South Carolina

Bob Jones was the birth of the modern 'Christian Right.'

- Politically engaged
- Response to social change
- "Moral Majority" yet oppressed minority

2. Today: LGBTQ & Reproductive Justice

Employment Division v. Smith (1990): Native Americans lose jobs because of peyote use, SCOTUS upholds.

Leads to *liberal* backlash and Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), raising standard for such cases.

RFRA requires:

- Compelling state interest necessary to abridge religious liberty
- Gov't solution is least intrusive way to accommodate it

In short, RFRA makes it very hard to burden religious freedom.

It shifts the First Amendment / Civil Rights balance more in favor of religion.

So today.....



Reproductive Justice



- "Conscience clauses" (religious exemptions) have expanded from doctors to hospitals to insurance companies
- And now, post *Hobby Lobby*, closely-held corporations can opt out of providing contraception coverage.

LGBTQ Equality

- Employment benefits
- Anti-discrimination law
- Denial of services
- Adoption bans
- Non-recognition of marriage

Elane Photography



- New Mexico Supreme Court holds that photographer's refusal to photograph a same-sex couple violates anti-discrimination law.
- This is the "poster child" for state RFRAs

But don't be deceived!

The wedding-cake bakers are outliers, and harder cases.

The real issue are employers, corporations, and huge religious organizations.

Kim Davis



So far, a government employee cannot refuse to do her job because of a religious reason.

3.
Major Players

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)




- ED is Alan Sears, author of *The Homosexual Agenda*
- \$35m annual budget
- Litigation and RFRAs across the country

3. Major Players

The Becket Fund FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



Becket Fund

- *Hobby Lobby*
- Conservative Catholics



3. Major Players

US Conference of Catholic Bishops



- Led public fight against HHS Mandate
- Also active to ban adoption by LGBTs
- Quasi-official arm of Church but more conservative



3. Major Players

Ethics & Public Policy Center



- Conservative DC Think Tank
- Robert George (Princeton) vice chair
- Rick Santorum was a fellow
- "Religious freedom caucuses" in 18 states



3. Major Players

4.
Why are religious exemptions so harmful?

1. Shield to Sword

RFFRA: Protect religious minorities' practices from government regulation)



Today: Enable majority groups to abridge the rights of others



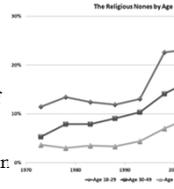
2. War on Religion?



- Longstanding theme
- Unpopular with middle but extremely popular with Right
- Christian martyr narrative
- Cf. "War on Christmas"

But also....

Not actually wrong



Maybe it's the loss of religious *hegemony* rather than liberty?

For this reason, I prefer to think of exemptions as motivated by fear, not hate.

3. Theological slippery slope

- Is signing an opt-out form really the same as "facilitating" the act one is opting out of?
- Is taking a picture "facilitating" a wedding?

4. Legal slippery slope

- May Christian inn owners who believe "miscegenation" is religiously forbidden exclude mixed-race couples?
- And what about Jews?



Nadler: "So suppose a photographer had a religious belief that she shouldn't photograph a Jewish wedding?"



Mat Staver (Liberty Counsel): "I think it would be something she wouldn't object to."

Nadler: "But what if she did?"



Mat Staver: "She would have an issue there—a violation potential in that case."

Thank you!

Jay Michaelson
www.jaymichaelson.net



THE DEVIL YOU KNOW 12.26.15 12:15 AM ET



JAY MICHAELSON

The Religious Right Is Right to Be Scared: Christianity Is Dying in America

Why try to understand complicated things like demographics for the decline of your faith when you can blame gays and liberals for waging a 'war on religion?'

Among the Christian Right, and most Republican presidential candidates, it's now an article of faith that the United States is persecuting Christians and Christian-owned businesses—that religion itself is under attack.

"We have seen a war on faith," Ted Cruz has said to pick one example. "His policies and this administration's animosity to religious liberty and, in fact, antagonism to Christians, has been one of the most troubling aspects of the Obama administration," he said.

Why has this bizarre myth that Christianity is under assault in the most religious developed country on Earth been so successful? Because, in a way, it's true. American Christianity is in decline—not because of a "war on faith" but because of a host of demographic and social trends. The gays and liberals are just scapegoats.

The idea that Christians are being persecuted resonates with millennia-old self-conceptions of Christian martyrdom. Even when the church controlled half the wealth in Europe, it styled itself as the flock of the poor and the marginalized. Whether true or not as a matter of fact, it is absolutely true as a matter of myth. Christ himself was persecuted and even

crucified, after all. So it's natural that Christianity losing ground in America would be



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JAY MICHAELSON

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NICOLAUS MILLS



According to a [Pew Research Report](#) released earlier this year, the percentage of the U.S. population that identifies as Christian has dropped from 78.4 percent in 2007 to 70.6 percent in 2014. Evangelical, Catholic, and mainline Protestant affiliations have all declined.

Meanwhile, 30 percent of Americans ages 18-29 list “none” as their religious affiliation (the figure for all ages is about 23 percent). Nearly 40 percent of Americans who have married since 2010 report that they are in “religiously mixed” marriages, which means that many individuals who profess Christianity are in families where not everyone does.

These changes are taking place for a constellation of reasons: greater secular education (college degrees), multiculturalism, [shifting social mores](#), the secular space of consumer capitalism and celebrity culture, the sexual revolution (including feminism and LGBT equality), [legal and constitutional changes](#) (like the banning of prayer in public school, and the finding of a constitutional right to same-sex marriage), the breakdown of the nuclear family, the decline of certain forms of family and group identification, and the association of religion in general with nonsensical and outdated dogmas. The Pew report noted Americans are also changing religions more than in the past, and when they do so, they are more likely to move away from Christianity than toward it.

So while changes in public morals regarding women and LGBT people (and how the law treats them) are part of the overall shift, they are only one part of an immensely complicated set of factors—and I’m quite sure I’ve left out some of the most important ones. Probably the [never-ending stream of sex scandals](#), from the Catholic clergy to the Duggar mess, haven’t helped either.

But no one likes a “constellation of reasons” to explain why the world they grew up in, and the values they cherish, seem to be slipping away. Enter the scapegoat: the war on religion, and the persecution of Christianity.

It’s much easier to explain changes by referring to a single, malevolent cause than by having to understand a dozen complex demographic trends. Plus, if Christianity is declining because it’s being attacked, then that decline could be reversed if the attack were successfully repelled. Unlike what is actually happening—a slow, seemingly irrevocable decline in American Christianity—the right’s argument that “religious liberty” is under assault mixes truth and fantasy to provide a simpler, and more palatable, explanation for believers.

Take, as an example, Christmas. The weird idea that there is a “War on Christmas” orchestrated by liberal elites—Starbucks cups in hand—is, on its face, ridiculous, even if it is widely held on the right. Shop clerks saying “Happy Holidays” aren’t causing the de-Christianization of Christmas—they’re effects of it. Roughly half of Americans celebrate Christmas as a cultural, not a religious, holiday: Santa Claus and Christmas trees, not baby Jesus in a manger. So that’s what businesses celebrate. It’s capitalism, not conspiracy.

Unfortunately, even if the war on religion is fictive, the “defense” against it is very real and very harmful. This year alone, 17 states [introduced legislation](#) to protect “religious



Hippocratic Oath, but also but private individuals and for-profit businesses. Already, we've seen pediatricians turn children away because their parents are gay, and wife-abusers argue that it's their religious duty to beat their spouses, and most notoriously that multimillion-dollar corporations like Hobby Lobby can have religious beliefs that permit them to refuse to provide health insurance to their employees on that basis.

Meanwhile, the "war on religion" narrative appears to be gaining ground. According to data from the Public Religion Research Institute, 61 percent of white evangelicals believe that religious liberty is being threatened today. (Only 37 percent of non-white Christians believe this, suggesting that what's really happening is an erosion of white Christian hegemony; the "browning of America" goes hand in hand with the de-Christianizing of America.) They believe they have lost the culture war, and even that LGBT people should now pity them.

In other words, "religious liberty" is not merely a tactic: it is a sincerely held belief among the religious right, which, not coincidentally, feeds into the belief that we are living in the End Times—something an astonishing 77 percent of American evangelicals believe.

We shouldn't think of Kim Davis and her ilk as motivated by hate. Actually, they are motivated by fear, which is based in reality but expressed in fantasy. Christianity is, in a sense, losing the war—but the fighters on the other side aren't gay activists or ACLU liberals but faceless social forces of secularization, urbanization, and diversification.

There's not really a villain pulling the strings of social change, but like the God concept itself, mythic thinking creates a personification of evil who is fighting the war on religious liberty, the war on Christmas, the war on Christianity. These malevolent evildoers are like a contemporary Satan: a fictive embodiment of all of the chaotic, complex forces that threaten the stability of religious order.

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Why Most Jewish Environmentalism Is Useless – on Tu B'Shvat and Every Other Day

By [Jay Michaelson](#)

January 22, 2016

[Anya Ulinich](#)

Tu B'Shvat, the Jewish “new year of the trees,” comes again on Sunday, January 24. In recent years, the holiday has become a much-needed day for thinking about, and taking action on, environmental issues.

Too bad most of those actions will be counterproductive.

For an illustration, consider the Aliso Canyon methane leak, which you probably haven't heard about. This leak erupted on October 23, 2015, near Los Angeles, and every day it spews 62,000,000 cubic feet of methane into the atmosphere. The Environmental Defense Fund [estimates](#) that's equivalent to the daily emissions of 7 million cars.

Put another way, since the leak sprung — it is still unplugged, and the engineering effort it will take to fix it is [mind-boggling](#) — it has released over 7,170,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide, equal to over 800 million gallons of gasoline.

Chances are, you won't hear much about Aliso Canyon at your local Tu B'Shvat Seder. Instead, you'll hear messages about “what you can do” to mitigate the effects of climate change. If your synagogue is particularly progressive, it will showcase how it's reduced its carbon footprint. Maybe it'll encourage you to carpool.



Getty Images

Parched Earth: The dried shores of Lake Gruyere in Switzerland, affected by continuous drought.

These actions are pointless. If you carpool five miles to synagogue every day for the rest of your life, you'll save around 300 gallons per year, or 15,000 gallons over fifty years. That's .001875% of what the Aliso Canyon methane leak has emitted so far. And of course, that leak, though unusually large, is just one of many across the country.

But “what you can do” type actions are worse than pointless; they're deceptive. They misstate the causes of climate change, confusing the issue and distracting people who care about it from what actually needs to be done. They are, in the words of Leviticus, stumbling blocks in front of the blind. And our Jewish educational institutions need to stop placing them there.

It just doesn't matter, at all, whether you buy carbon offsets when you fly, or don't fly at all. These are tiny matchsticks on the face of the sun. Nor is it even true that if we all did these things, the problem would get better. It wouldn't.

The overwhelming causes of climate change are macro-scale, not micro-scale: specifically, fossil fuels in power plants and vehicles. In the United States, according to the EPA, power plants are responsible for 37% of all human-caused carbon emissions. Coal is by far the worst offender. Transportation is another 31%, industry 15%, residential/commercial 10%.

To make a dent in any of these macro-scale problems will require not lots of micro-scale changes, but coordinated, collective action. We need to wean ourselves off coal, switch to renewables and change the incentives in the transportation sector so that everyone, not just green liberals like you and me, drives electric cars that plug into a sustainable power grid.

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Likewise on methane. Believe it or not, 26% of U.S. methane emissions come from livestock like cows, which belch and fart it out. The storage, transmission and processing of natural gas — including leaks like the one in California — are responsible for 29% of methane emissions. Landfills are 18%, coal mining 10%, and the processing of manure in agriculture, another 10%.

It's easy to joke about cow farts, but behind the joke is an indictment of how much beef Americans consume, and how perversely incentivized we are to do so by corn subsidies and other corporate welfare.

As a religious or ethical matter, there is something to be said for refusing, personally, to be part of the problem. Congratulations, you are morally pure. It feels good, which is part of why I drive a Prius, heat my house with wind energy (not really, but I pay my provider to buy a meaningless sliver of power from wind), and limit my red meat intake to around 25% of the national average, including vegetarians, of 75 pounds per year.

But all of that is meaningless if systemic change doesn't take place. My quest for environmental moral purity is, in fact, an exercise in self-delusion. Sure, I've swept my part of the sidewalk, but meanwhile the entire street is being covered in dirt. That's not "doing my share." It's pointless, wasted effort.

What would be "doing our share," then?

Easy: changing our government and persuading our neighbors.

First, the only way to wean the country off coal is to enact nationwide policies to do so. But right now, even modest steps by the Obama administration are bitterly opposed, and occasionally neutralized, in Congress.

For example, the Interior Department recently announced a moratorium on new coal leases on federal lands. These below-market leases cost taxpayers money, and are yet another form of corporate welfare doled out to the energy sector. They make coal artificially cheap and encourage its overuse.

And yet even this common-sense economic/environmental decision was, predictably, attacked by Republican congressional leaders and presidential candidates — who, of course, are themselves on corporate welfare, receiving inordinate support from the energy sector including its arch-villains, the Koch brothers.

It will be impossible to make the systemic changes necessary to limit the disastrous impacts of climate change when even modest changes are fought, litigated and often overturned.

Or denied outright — which leads me to the second thing we all should be doing about climate change: persuading our neighbors of basic science.

There is absolutely no doubt, zero, zilch, *gornisht*, about the theory and reality of anthropogenic climate change. The consensus among scientists is remarkable: 13,926 out of 13,950 peer-reviewed articles published between 1991-2002, to be precise. That's 99.83% of peer-reviewed scientists.

And the handful of individuals opposing the scientific consensus, repeatedly quoted in Republican propaganda, have been exposed as frauds.

Yet only 42% of Americans believe humans are causing climate change, down from about 70% in 2001. This is the result of billions of dollars of lying by the energy sector, just like the tobacco industry once did, a campaign carefully documented by writers like Naomi Oreskes, James Hoggan and the DeSmog bloggers.



thinkstock

So, while climate believers gather on Tu B'Shvat to commit to composting their eggshells, more and more Americans are coming to believe the lie that climate change isn't happening at all. Imagine if the true believers actually talked to the doubters, for a change.

This is a matter of life and death — especially in Israel, where the effects of global warming will be particularly destabilizing, as we have already seen in Syria. Rabbis should be preaching about the truth of climate change, ensuring that no one falls for the lies the energy sector is telling in the name of short-term profits. And not preaching to the converted, either.

But instead of the hard facts, Jews generally get well-intentioned suggestions to turn off the lights when we go out for a movie. And so the apathetic tune out and the true believers waste their time.

Well, here's the Tu B'Shvat reality. You, singular, cannot make a difference. Only we, plural, can. Let's stop deluding ourselves into uselessness and get to work.

Jay Michaelson is a contributing editor to the Forward.



[Opinion](#) » [National](#)

Is Donald Trump–Style Populism Just Human Nature?

By [Jay Michaelson](#)

June 29, 2016

[Nikki Casey](#)

For most liberal American Jews, it has been an article of faith that things are gradually, in fits and starts, getting better. “Progress” is not irreversible, and there are inevitably backlashes to every advance. But in general, the combination of American optimism and secularized Jewish messianism has long held sway in our community.

What, then, to make of the [shocking rise of nativist populism](#) in post-Brexit Britain, France, Israel, the Netherlands, Austria, Hungary and, of course, here in the United States? It’s as if a dark cloud has gathered, seemingly from nowhere but actually from 100 disparate sources; populist fear and ignorance threaten the march of civilization itself.

On one level, these are still [the best of times](#). We are still living in the healthiest, wealthiest, least violent period in human history. Our situation is precarious, since our species possesses more power to destroy itself than ever before. But we are living longer, better and freer than at any other time, ever.

On another level, though, the unreconstructed animal nature of the human heart seems to amplify anxieties about our self-destruction. Where did right-wing populism come from, and how can it be stopped?

We know that Brexit voters were, on the whole, old, English and less educated; compared to Leave voters, Remain voters were, on the whole, younger, cosmopolitan and better educated. Likewise, Donald Trump’s voters are older, whiter and less educated on average.

But while the proximate causes of these people’s discontent are many ([as discussed in a previous column](#)), the reasons that they react as they do run deeper than economics or [xenophobia](#), to something about human nature itself.

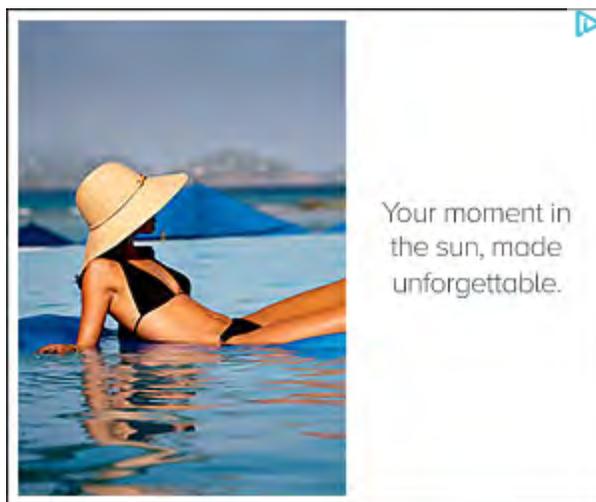
As political psychologists like Drew Westen and Jonathan Haidt have described, we are still social animals who often value loyalty to the group over tolerance of difference. The conservatives among us, especially, are terrified of changes to the existing order. Trump, Nigel Farage, Avigdor Lieberman — these are all symptoms, not causes, of the malady. The real diagnosis must in the end be psychological, anthropological, even spiritual. Old white men in Europe and America play at being strong, with (as President Obama infamously quipped) their guns and their God, but in fact they are scared to death. Their old order, with its racial, linguistic and ethnic hierarchies, is indeed falling apart. They're not incorrect in noticing this.

Likewise, the hysterical claims of religious conservatives that Christianity is under attack by liberals, Muslims and everyone else do contain a grain of truth within them: Their form of Christianity is on the wane, and secular culture is partly to blame. They aren't being cynical when they scream that same-sex marriage threatens marriage; they really believe it to be true.

And they're not entirely wrong. In his new book [“The End of White Christian America”](#), Public Religion Research Institute CEO Robert P. Jones points out that in 1993, 51% of Americans identified as white Protestants. In 2014 that number was 34%. President Obama — non-white, believed to be non-Christian [by 43% of Republicans](#) — may be a symbol of this transformation, but, like Trump, he is not the cause of it.

Similarly, Jones also found that 75% of self-identified tea party supporters agreed that “today discrimination against whites has become as big a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities.” As the saying ([coined by Ali Owens](#), modified by the internet) goes, when you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.

When these psychological faculties — fear of change, strong in-group identity, high valuing of tradition — are not accompanied by education, exposure to others and moral reasoning, we are indeed a species susceptible to the likes of Trump.



Maybe this is the last gasp of a dying worldview, doomed by obsolescence and demographics. Maybe we can just wait out the storm. But the arc of history must be bent toward justice; it does not incline that way on its own. And besides, how much damage will be done in the meantime? What happens if our country, like Britain, chooses populism, nativism and fear masquerading as strength? What can be done not about the epiphenomena of Trump and Front National, but about those who support them?

The solution must be as deep as the problem. Thanks to Haidt and the studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on which he based his best-seller “The Righteous Mind,” we know that conservatives see as moral the values many progressives see as immoral. For example, according to [yet more PRRI [data](#), 77% of Trump supporters agree, “It bothers me when I come in contact with immigrants who speak little to no English,” compared with 66% of Republicans and 35% of Democrats.

To progressives, this reflects ignorance, fear and nativism, which we see as moral failings. But to many conservatives, this reflects patriotism and pride. Likewise Israel’s loyalty oaths, Britain’s separation from Europe and France’s restrictions on Islam. Populists aren’t compromising their values; they are expressing them.

Yet just because someone says a thing is moral doesn’t make it so. Over the centuries, it has been “moral” for women to be subservient to men, African-descended people to be subservient to European-descended ones and Jews to be subservient to Christians. These values change slowly, but they do change. If people change them.

We need a media culture that reflects the diversity of Americans, a religious culture that does away with ethnocentrism and ludicrous claims to exclusivity (primarily a Christian problem, but a Jewish one as well), and perhaps above all an educational system that inculcates values of pluralism and multiculturalism.

It's no surprise that the same far-right billionaires funding the tea party are also funding home-schooling and bogus educational institutions. Education, civics, rationality, critical thinking — these are anathema to their worldview. And as much as conservatives may hate millennial campuses critical of rape culture, critical of Eurocentrism and critical of white supremacy (that is, “political correctness”), all are signs of an educational environment that can decrease nativism, blur lines between in-group and out-group, and question the hierarchies that enforce them.

Populists tend to be undereducated, anti-intellectual and susceptible to simplistic ideas like building a U.S.-Mexico wall at a cost of \$25 billion (how, exactly, would Mexico pay for it again?), and with zero impact on those who overstay visas, the largest subset of first-generation undocumented immigrants. They're swayed by emotional appeals that blame “the other,” because those appeals provide simple answers to real questions of suffering, dislocation and anomie. (Jews, it bears noting, are often among those “others.”) Such values must be uprooted at their source — and if they cannot be uprooted, they must at least not be planted in the next generation. The vulnerable, less-educated and populism-ripe sectors of our society need to get “woke,” as the euphemism has it: awakened to the realities of oppression and inequality, rather than to easy fantasies that explain them. We need real moral education, real multicultural education, real civics education.

It is not okay, and not surprising, that British voters Googled “What is the E.U.?” after they voted to leave it. One can only pray that on November 9, American voters won't be Googling “Where is Mexico?”

The highly educated American Jewish population could be a model, rather than a scapegoat, in returning education to the center of our national debate. In a time when Republican politicians are slashing funds for public education, we should be on the front lines to restore it. In a culture ruled by clickbait, we should be standing for reflection and critical thinking.

And in the age of the tweet, maybe we can be the People of the Book.

Jay Michaelson is a contributing editor to the Forward. Follow him on Twitter, [@JayMichaelson](#)

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